

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MODERNIST ENCOUNTERS ACROSS BORDERS:  
MAY ZIADEH AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

by  
DANA ADNAN AL SHAHBARI

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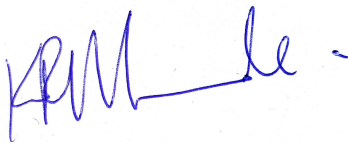
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A special word of thanks goes to my family for their unconditional emotional support. Thank you for believing in me in times where I doubted myself. You always tell me how proud you are of me, but it is my pride to be part of this family. *Teta* Ilham, my precious angel in the sky, thank you for being *Ilhāmī*, my true inspiration. To my friends, thank you for being there for me through thick and thin, I am blessed to be surrounded by genuine and caring people like you. My love also goes to the light of my life, my beautiful nephews and niece, for being my source of positive energy and endless smiles.

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Modernist Encounters across Borders: May Ziadeh and Virginia Woolf

Literary modernism is a movement that originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with its roots typically acknowledged to be western. However, in recent decades, the question of modernity outside the geographical boundary of Europe has been circulating in the rising field of global modernism. Building upon this theoretical ground, this thesis argues for respatializing the modernist movement through expanding its parameters beyond Eurocentric notions. As the title indicates, it trespasses borders to allow comparing May Ziadeh(1886-1941), an early example of an Arab modernist activist and writer, on equal footing with Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), an iconic western figure of modernity. To do so, this study juxtaposes Ziadeh’s *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* (Words and Signs,1922) with Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), marking an original and non-hierarchical comparison of the two writers and their respective publications. Performed and written in the same period and in a male dominated world, a cross-cultural comparative reading of the two texts uncovers the recurrence of common motifs while avoiding the dissolve of their unique and local contexts. Chapter two introduces “shadow” as a new keyword in the field of global modernism and investigates the shadowing of Ziadeh and Woolf in modernist studies. It then addresses how they responded to the multiple shadows in the Egyptian and British contexts respectively. Chapter three contributes to adding an Arab modern lens to another keyword, “tradition”, and suggests the possibility of its multi-conceptions and functions beyond the European archive. What shadows hindered the emergence of Ziadeh and Woolf? And how did they manage to come out from these shadows? In times of modernism, what was the nature of their relationship with traditions in the Arabic and Western scenes respectively? What traditions did they leave behind and what did they hold onto? To what extent did they have a sense of belonging to their respective pasts, and to what extent did they feel alienated?

## PREFACE

Dear Readers,

You might wonder why my introduction reads like a lecture. Why is it not introducing the characters written in my title: May Ziadeh and Virginia Woolf? As in convention with academic writing, why is it not stating theories of comparison?

Allow me, my readers, to explain why. The truth is, these two women, May Ziadeh and Virginia Woolf, are writers and, also, lecturers. And I, being the comparatist here, have decided to follow their path. Excuse me, my readers, if I did not abide by the traditional rules of introducing a thesis. I ought to be original, like my writers taught me to be. I ought to think creatively, and to share, without any hesitation or doubt, the ideas that flow in my mind. I am aware that you are reading these pages on a screen, for no longer do we read much on paper. But I have picked up my pen to write my words on a notebook, just like my female writers did back in the early twentieth century when drafting their lectures before going up to the podium.

I carry this notebook as I walk around my university, the American University of Beirut, and the image of Woolf wandering the streets in London comes to my mind. I stop by West Hall, and I can't help but imagine the claps of Ziadeh's audience after a lecture she delivered here, in West Hall, in 1922. What an honor would it have been to be the first woman to lecture at AUB! And what a wonderful place for me to be, a place that brings together the spirits of the East and the West, and that exposes me to both. As I continue my walk, I envision AUB as a place where Ziadeh's Lebanese roots extend and where I have learned much about Woolf in literary discussions. But not once have I learned about these two authors in constellation to one another, so why would I position

myself as a comparatist who can bring their voices together? And why, nearly a hundred years after Ziadeh and Woolf's death, would this comparison matter?

Now you, my readers, would think "but we haven't been introduced yet to these writers. We do know their names by now, and we know they wrote and lectured in the early twentieth century, but we need to know more". Well, if I were to start with May Ziadeh, my pen would flow and flow, but I will limit myself to the following biography. Mary Elias Ziadeh, later known as May Ziadeh, was born and raised in Nazareth, Palestine in 1886 to a Lebanese father and a Palestinian mother. In 1899, Ziadeh and her parents moved to Lebanon where she received her secondary education before emigrating to Egypt in 1908. There, her father founded *al-Mahrousa* newspaper where she contributed a number of articles and started publishing in Arabic and French in leading Egyptian newspapers and magazines (Ghorayeb 375). Ziadeh was bilingual in Arabic and French, but as an eager learner of languages, she also learned English, Italian, German, and Latin during her stay in Cairo. In 1916, Ziadeh enrolled in the Egyptian University for four years where she studied the history of philosophy and Arabic literature along with Islamic history (al-Kawwal 10).

However, Ziadeh was not only a journalist and a curious learner of languages and history; she was also a writer. In 1910, she published her first collection of French poems in Cairo, *Fleurs de rêve* (Flowers of Dream), under the pseudonym "Isis Copia". However, shortly after this shy start, Ziadeh was writing, publishing, and lecturing about various topics that were reflective of the literary and social movements specific to her context, al-Nahda period in Egypt. Al-Nahda, known as the Arab Awakening or Renaissance, is defined in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* as "the process of Arabic literary and cultural renewal" which occurred during the second half of the

nineteenth century and the early years of twentieth century in Arabic speaking regions, especially in Egypt, where Ziadeh spent most of her life (573). It was a period of renewal in a range of fields from military to politics and culture. In the literary realm, al-Nahda is known for exploring different literary techniques and experimenting with new writing genres to pave the way for modern Arabic literature, not to mention the rising interest in magazine editing and translation that Ziadeh was also involved in. She did not only revolutionize the prose genre by experimenting with the form of the essay and biographical writing, but also used her writing skills to advocate for the emancipation of women.

Being a prominent figure of this Nahda movement, a pioneer of women's movement in Arab culture, and the founder of one of the most famous literary salons in the Arab world during the early twentieth century, I argue that Ziadeh is a key figure in the Arab literary scene. Now note my readers, that such a marvelous woman has not been given her worth in literary studies neither in the Arab world nor beyond it! But how would she be recognized beyond her context if her texts were never translated? And I ask myself, why is she underrepresented in the first place? But I decide to shift my focus to a more important and action-calling question: How can I recover Ziadeh and bring her name to the table of literary discussions? And how can I acknowledge her significant contributions to al-Nahda movement? I choose to do so through the field of comparison, as long as my comparison is decentered and non-hierarchical, for Ziadeh is not an insignificant peripheral writer. Now you might say, this is too theoretical, a non-hierarchical comparison? How is that possible in a world of dichotomies: an advanced West vs. a belated East? I will keep my answer short here, so be patient with me, for I will thoroughly explain my approach in my second chapter.



However, before discussing the basis of my comparison, I would like to clarify that this comparison would not have been possible if I did not translate excerpts from Ziadeh's works in my project. As David Damrosch argues, a work becomes "reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts" (24). However, to my knowledge, none of Ziadeh's works were translated into English, which prevents their circulation beyond an Arabic language context. As I set out to recover Ziadeh, I am aware of the necessity of a pre-requisite and essential step in knowledge production and circulation, that is translation. Through it, I contribute to making Ziadeh's writings more accessible, visible, and ready for comparisons.

I base my comparison on methodological discussions in global modernism, an emerging field of research that is centered on the global turn in modernist studies. In brief, global modernism advocates for engaging with works produced in spaces "throughout the world" rather than solely engaging with modern European productions (Hayot and Walkowitz 1). One effective method of revisioning modern works from a global modernist perspective is comparison where researchers explore modernism beyond Eurocentric notions, which ultimately serves my argument of respatializing the modernist movement. As Susan Stanford Friedman puts it, "to be global in reach, modernist studies will have to become more comparative" (504). However, comparison itself is examined in global modernism, for its methodologies, politics, and challenges are carefully reflected upon.

Allow me, my readers, to pause here, for I must introduce my second writer, Virginia Woolf, whom I'm reading in constellation with May Ziadeh in my thesis. Unlike Ziadeh, Woolf is one of the best-known writers in the early twentieth century. She was born in London in 1882 and died in the same year as Ziadeh in 1941, and in similar

circumstances too, which brings me to an aspect of their lives that I haven't told you about yet: their "madness". Women have been associated with madness throughout history, especially women writers. While I won't get into the details of the mark of madness attributed to Ziadeh and Woolf, I want you, my readers, to join me in resisting and stepping out of this limiting and patriarchal lens, for it does nothing but delegitimize the perception of their literary figures and intellectual value.

To come back to Woolf then, her educational background is very different from that of Ziadeh, for she did not attend a school but was educated at home, a common norm in Victorian high societies. Nonetheless, she managed to become a prolific writer of fiction, essays, diaries, and letters and is known to have experimented with key elements of modernism in her works. Through the streams of consciousness innovation, for instance, Woolf participated in the modernism movement that fostered a period of experimentation in the arts from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. This period also marked revolutions and radical changes in society, remarkably with the rise of the first wave of feminism in the aftermath of World War I. Woolf, among other feminist activists, was demanding the recognition of women's needs to fulfill their potential in their professional lives, societies, homes, and most importantly, in writing.

In setting Woolf, an acknowledged prime maker of modernism, on equal footing with Ziadeh whose intellectual worth is not recognized yet, I propose a comparative reading that connects their mark on the literary landscape in relation to global modernism. My project however does not erase the socio-political and linguistic differences; rather, it preserves their uniqueness and impact on the modernism of each sphere. To return to my question about the significance of this study, I can now share with you that its significance is twofold: First, it initiates scholarly interest in the figure of May Ziadeh,

especially as I translate excerpts from her writings and shed light on her overlooked contributions. This can further serve as a stepping stone to work towards achieving a tradition of studying neglected yet valuable Arab women writers. Second, my project proposes a more nuanced and feminist vision of global modernism marked by the recurrence of certain common patterns and themes exemplified through Ziadeh and Woolf's writings. In that, my project brings together the different fields of global modernism, feminism, English and Arabic literatures, rhetoric, translation, and postcolonial studies.

To give you a glimpse of what awaits you next, I will zoom in on the texts I have chosen for comparison. My take on Ziadeh primarily elaborates on *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* (Words and Signs) which gathers a number of influential lectures that were published in 1922. These lectures were performed between the years 1911 and 1920 to a mixed audience: sometimes a women audience, at other men, and sometimes targeted at both. Moreover, these lectures were not performed in one single place. Ziadeh was invited to lecture in her homeland Lebanon, its neighboring country Syria, and in Egypt.

Just like Ziadeh approached the podium to lecture on women's movement and modernism, Woolf in the same period, but in the heart of the British Empire, was also advocating for women's emancipation in a modernist voice targeted at a women-only audience in Britain. Like Ziadeh's book, *A Room of One's Own* was born out of a series of lectures delivered in October 1928 at women's constituent colleges at the University of Cambridge, namely Newnham and Girton's College. One year later, these lectures were gathered and published as a six-chaptered book, expanding the reach to a wider audience of readers in and beyond Europe.

Performed and written in the same period and in a male dominated world, a cross-cultural comparative reading of the two texts uncovers the recurrence of common motifs while preserving their respective contexts. To zoom in more closely on the structure of this comparison, I focus on two keywords, shadows and traditions. In addition, I give a brief analysis of alienation in my conclusion. I am particularly motivated by the following questions: What shadows hindered the emergence of Ziadeh and Woolf? And how did they manage to come out from these shadows? In times of modernism, what was the nature of their relationship with traditions in the Arabic and Western scenes respectively? What traditions did they leave behind and what did they hold onto? To what extent did they have a sense of belonging to their respective pasts, and to what extent did they feel alienated?

Attempting to answer these questions, I focus in my second chapter on a keyword that I add to the field of global modernism: “shadow”. There, I contextualize the shadowing of Ziadeh and Woolf’s writings in the male-oriented field of modernism while considering their unique Egyptian and British contexts respectively. Then, I delve more into comparing their response to the multiple shadows on women in the early twentieth century. In my third chapter, the focus shifts to another keyword that I did not initiate in the field of global modernism, for it is already being discussed. However, my original contribution lies in adding an Arab modern lens to conceptions of tradition and its function beyond the European center. Through this new lens, I draw relations between traditions and authenticity in my conclusion, suggesting the latter as an emerging question in global modernism that is worth exploring in future projects. If I were to summarize my project in one sentence, I would describe it as a comparison of two keywords, in two texts

coming from two women writers in the historical and cultural context of two literary movements, framed in the field of global modernism.

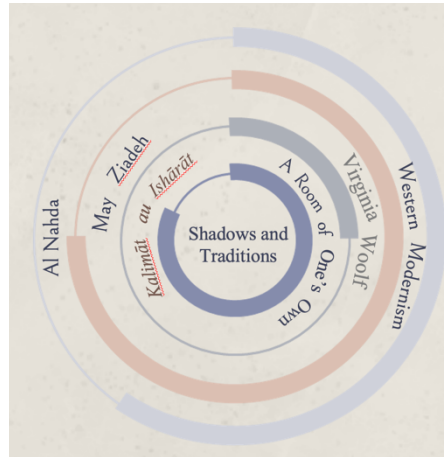


Figure 1. Visual of the Project

So, prepare yourself, my dear readers. You are a few pages away from exploring an original comparison, an unprecedented one, that juxtaposes Ziadeh with Woolf in one world, the world of global modernism.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **A. Notes on Transliterations and Translations**

The transliteration from Arabic follows the format of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). While Ziadeh's name is spelled in various ways in English, it is spelled consistently in this study as May Ziadeh. However, the spelling in the literature review and the works cited sections may differ. For example, some works spell her name as Mayy Ziyāda, Mai Ziada, and May Ziyadeh.

Regarding the translations, all the translated passages of Ziadeh are my own work. As Ziadeh's works in Arabic are not translated to English, I translate excerpts of her works, whenever relevant, to make them accessible for English readers and also comparable with Woolf's text. Whenever a long passage is indented in Arabic, it is directly followed by the English translation. However, shorter passages from Ziadeh's works are directly translated to English without being preceded with the original Arabic.

### **B. Review of Literature**

From the preface, we have learned that my thesis is a comparative study between May Ziadeh and Virginia Woolf. While the preface is inspired by creative writing of a creative nature, I shall now return to the standards of academic writing, and foreground my research in a framed and nuanced literature review of May Ziadeh. However, I must justify first why my review is concerned with Ziadeh alone, without Woolf. As I argue more extensively in my second chapter, and specifically under the subtitle "Recovering May Ziadeh," substantial scholarly attention has been given to Woolf, but not so for



Ziadeh. As I set to carve out a space for Ziadeh in literary discussions, I will begin by giving a brief survey of what has been written about her in Arabic and English, and to situate my research in, or beyond, already-existing scholarly conversations. In this review, key topics are organized under three headings: (1) Documentaries on Ziadeh, (2) Finding Ziadeh in Archives, and (3) Scholarship on Ziadeh. My sources offer biographical information on Ziadeh, but expose a large gap in sources on her writings. My research sets out to fill this empty space and to recover Ziadeh in the Arab and global scenes of modernism.

(1) Documentaries on Ziadeh:

Despite her prominent role in women's emancipation movement and modernism, little scholarly attention has been given to Ziadeh's literary career. In my search of Ziadeh, I found her in three recent documentaries, a number of books, and archives.

Firstly, Al Jazeera's documentary (2016) introduces Ziadeh as a key figure in the Arab literary scene in the early twentieth century who has firmly established herself as a vibrant female voice in the man's world of her time. In documenting Ziadeh's life and her diversified career, Al Jazeera identifies her as a beacon of modern Arabic literature. This one-hour documentary was screened in both Arabic and English languages. Interestingly, the title greatly varies between the two. In the English version that came out two years after the original Arabic one (2018), the title is "May Ziadeh: The Life of an Arab Feminist Writer." In Arabic, it is "Farāshat al-adab- May Ziadeh," which translates to "The Butterfly of Literature- May Ziadeh." While the content of the two versions is exactly the same, the difference in titles is worth pointing out. In my analysis, the English title is meant to attract a western audience. By referring to Ziadeh as a feminist writer, she becomes more appealing and fit to western expectations. However, for an Arab

audience, Ziadeh is remembered and perceived, as always, as a myth of Al Nahda movement. Hence, despite representing a recent interest in the figure of Ziadeh, I argue that this documentary doesn't give her the justice she deserves. Evidently, it largely discusses Ziadeh in light of two matters only: her exchange of love letters with Gibran Khalil Gibran and her madness.

Likewise, Abu Dhabi TV (2018) produced a television documentary that describes Ziadeh as a unique phenomenon in the Arab literary history. Most prominently, it focuses on her role as the hostess of Tuesday's literary salon where she brought together Egyptian intellectuals. This is a ten-minute Arabic documentary from The Critical 30" program by Dr. Ali Bin Tamim, which aims to shed light on thirty critical works that were influential in the Arab culture generally and in their cultural, social, and political contexts more specifically. May Ziadeh is presented here as an exceptional woman who is nonetheless reduced again to two main matters: her madness and the platonic love story with Gibran. Although this documentary wrongs the accusation of madness, it still narrates the love story and briefly lists a number of Ziadeh's works without pointing out their contribution to (re)forming Arab thought. As evident from Al Jazeera and Abu Dhabi's documentaries, Ziadeh and Gibran's love story is very famous, but what remains neglected is their exchange of criticism letters, which I read as instances of reflections and intellectual exchange.

The third documentation on Ziadeh is a lecture by Waciny Al Araj (2017), who is an Algerian novelist, short story writer and academic, given at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This talk, entitled "May Ziadeh: al- ḥadātha al-ma'tūba wa Ma'ālāt al-kitāba" (May Ziadeh: Flawed Modernism and the Functions of Writing) is centered on Ziadeh's contribution to Al Nahda movement in the Arab culture and literature. Al Araj

gives an overview about Ziadeh the magazine editor, translator, writer, orator, and the literary salon hostess. He also talks about his novel *May- the Nights of Isis Copia* that highlights the social and intellectual war against Ziadeh where she was admitted into the mental hospital after being accused of madness by her family and did not receive support from her peer intellectuals. In that, Al Araj considers Al Nahda as a flawed and defective movement where Ziadeh was not given enough scholarly attention and intellectual value despite her pioneering role in Al Nahda and women's movements. This claim is particularly significant as it makes me question the reason(s) behind this accusation, who benefits from it, and its aftereffect on Ziadeh's status as a women writer in the early twentieth century. Among other documentaries, Al Araj's lecture remains a rich source for knowing distinctive information about Ziadeh. He posits challenging questions about her identity, her admission to the mental hospital, and the absence of her name in the Arabic literary scene. The fact that Al Araj does not only focus on Ziadeh alone but also on her intellectual relationship with significant writers at her time provides a new perspective on Ziadeh's life.

Taken together, these three recent sources represent a contemporary interest in Ziadeh. The information about her vibrant female voice and Al Araj's account of modernism as flawed is particularly useful for my research as I continue questioning why Ziadeh's name is misrepresented and overshadowed among other intellectuals of her time.

## (2) Finding Ziadeh in Archives:

Even though this thesis sets to recover Ziadeh in translation and comparison, there remains another significant site of recovery that is worth pointing out, archives. Looking back at my journey of finding Ziadeh, I had the chance to explore and work with archival

material that is available at AUB's Archives and Special Collections. Speaking of efforts of recovery, this material by and about Ziadeh at AUB is worth exploring in another project where archives act as sites of power, resistance, memory, and knowledge production.

To provide a brief overview of Ziadeh's archival material, I should note that they are twenty-eight documents in total: some of these are her handwritten letters, lectures, newspapers and magazine publications, subtitles in the press dedicated alone to the narrative of madness, along with reviews on Ziadeh in the Lebanese press. As the purpose of this section is to examine the literature on Ziadeh, I will limit my focus to what has been written on Ziadeh, and not by her. To start with, *Lajnat al-Udīsiyā Lil Thaqāfa Wal I'lām* (The Odyssey Committee for Education and Media) in collaboration with *Lajnat Takrīm Dhikrā May Ziadeh* (The Committee of Honoring the Memory of May Ziadeh) released a booklet in 1999 on Ziadeh. Entitled *Natadhakar May Ziadeh* (Remembering May Ziadeh), this booklet includes Ziadeh's biographical information, a list of her published works, and more than forty letters of honor in prose and poetry dedicated to Ziadeh from her contemporary colleagues and later scholars. In addition to that, *Al Kulliyah Review*, an AUB bilingual magazine, published a short interview with Ziadeh in English that highlights her interest in languages and literature as well as her praise of AUB.

In another article published also in English in 1972, *Al Kulliyah* describes Ziadeh as "the foremost woman writer of the first two decades of this century in Arabic" and elaborates on her role in the making of modern Arabic literature (16). This article reads like a biography of May Ziadeh as it addresses her birth date and place, upbringing and education, admission to mental hospital, Tuesday's literary salon, and her active role in

the women's emancipation movement in Cairo. Defending Ziadeh against the accusation of madness, this article narrates Ziadeh's active return to lecturing after her release from the mental hospital, affirming in this way her inspected sanity. In addition to *Al Kulliyah*, *As-Safir*, *An-Nahar*, and *Al Bina'* are also Lebanese magazines that have published on May Ziadeh. Interestingly enough, these publications are relatively new when compared to *Al Kulliyah*'s as they date back to year 2000, 2009, and 2018 respectively; marking thus a renewed interest in studying Ziadeh's diverse contributions to the Nahda movement and revisiting Ziadeh's narrative of madness in her homeland, Lebanon.

Last but not least, Ziadeh's archival box includes a brochure entitled "Banāt Blādī" (Women from My Country) that was published in Lebanon in 2003 on the occasion of the National Heritage Day. This brochure lists Lebanese women activists, politicians, artists, and writers where Ziadeh's name finds itself under the category of "Nisā' al-qalam" (The Pen Women). Coming back to Al Araj's lecture and his concern with Ziadeh's identity, this brochure raises further questions on what it means to regard Ziadeh as a Lebanese woman whose name is celebrated among other Lebanese women writers like Julia Tohme Dimachkieh, Roz al-Yosef, and Salwa Nassar. Knowing that Ziadeh comes from Lebanese-Palestinian roots and has lived most of her life in Egypt, identifying and celebrating Ziadeh as a Lebanese writer is problematic, especially that she was accused of madness in Lebanon. This claim becomes even more problematic as Ziadeh herself was troubled by her identity. She even addressed the identity crisis in her book *Zulumāt wa Ashi'a* (Darkness and Light), and specifically under the subtitle "Ayna Waṭānī" (Where Is My Homeland). There, she writes, "I was born in a country. My father is from one country and my mother from another. My spirits travel from one land to another. So, to which of these countries do I belong?" (81).

### (3) Scholarship on Ziadeh:

Moving on to the books and articles that have been written on Ziadeh, her misrepresentation as a mad woman and as Gibran's lover continues to be the case. Here, I refer to a book published by Dār Ṣāḍir in Beirut (2001), by Jamīl Jabir, entitled *Qiṣat ḥub Aghrab Min al-khayāl bayna May wa Gibrān* (May and Gibran's Love Story, Stranger than Fantasy). As its title suggests, this book is focused on the famous love story between these two authors that has been tied to Ziadeh's name. However, tying Ziadeh with feelings of love wasn't only limited to Gibran, but also with attendees of her literary salon. Instead of reading the salon as a literary space that generates critical and literary conversations, scholars have dedicated documentaries, journals, and sometimes articles to highlight the love dynamics between "the lady of the salon" and male intellectuals. For instance, the *Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies* published an article in 2017 titled "ushāq ḥawla May Ziadeh: al-'qqāḍ Namūdhajan" (Lovers Around May Ziadeh: A Case Study of al-Akkad). Abbas Mahmud al-Akkad is an Egyptian journalist, poet, and literary critic who regularly attended Ziadeh's Salon. As this article argues, al-Akkad has an emotional persona that is revealed through his correspondences with Ziadeh, the woman who had lovers gathered all around her but chose to love Gibran and who suffered from depression and loneliness.

Reducing the figure of Ziadeh to a mad yet charming woman, to me, is worse than neglect. Ziadeh is a writer, journalist, magazine editor, orator, translator, and a literary salon hostess for more than twenty years. The multiple roles that she took symbolize her complete devotion to embodying a real "awakening" in the language of the East and in women's status in the early twentieth century. She injected a new social and cultural flavor that was unknown to the Arab scene at her time, but despite these great

contributions, her name is misrepresented, overshadowed, and resides uncomfortably on the margins of Al Nahda movement. As my research proves so far, some attention has been given to Ziadeh's persona and her biography. Mjais (2012) further provides an overview of Ziadeh's life in Egypt and Lebanon, her lectures, magazine publications, love and criticism letters to Gibran Khalil Gibran, her openness to the West, and her enthusiastic participation in feminist movements in Syria and Egypt. This book, entitled *May Ziadeh, Nushū' W'rtiqā' al-muthaqafa al-ḥura* (May Ziadeh, The Upbringing and Growth of the Liberal Intellectual) , is of a biographical nature, and is a rich source for acquiring a clear image of Ziadeh's life and remarkable moments in her literary and social engagement. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, AUB's Libraries, and specifically in the Women's Awakening collection, regard Ziadeh as a *ra'ida*, or a pioneer, of Al Nahda movement. They further include a link to her biography in *al-Marefa's Encyclopedia*, where again, her madness and love stories were narrated, along with a list of her major books and publications.

On another note, al-Anzi recently published a book entitled *Nisā' Fī Ghurfat Virginia Woolf* (Women in Virginia Woolf's Room-2021) that addresses Ziadeh and Woolf's early efforts in women's movements and affirms the lack of scholarly attention given to them in the Arabic context. Al-Anzi's book also provides an overview of Ziade and Woolf's lives and their tragic ends, but it lacks a critical comparative approach that highlights the different social, political, and spatial contexts these two women wrote from; which makes my research crucial in initiating such an approach.

So far, the literature provides an overview of Ziadeh, her multiple roles, and the kind of writings she has produced. In addition to the famous biography of Ziadeh, her writing

on women's biography has gained some prominence in scholarship. Marilyn Booth (1991) published a journal article entitled "Biography and Feminist Rhetoric in Early Twentieth-Century Egypt: Mayy Ziyada's Studies of Three Women's Lives" where she studies the power of biography writing in creating a feminist consciousness. Booth takes Ziadeh's writing on women's biographies as a case study, and she looks at the literary biographies Ziadeh wrote on three women writers and activists: *Bāḥithat al-Bādiyā* (1920), *Āisha Taymūr* (1926), and *Warda al-Yāzījī* (1926). Twenty-seven years later, Hala Kamal (2018) revisits these biographies and reads them as works of cultural memory and feminist history in her article "Women's Writing on Women's Writing": Mayy Ziyada's Literary Biographies as Egyptian Feminist History".

The literature discussed provides an overview of Ziadeh's biography, and it covers some areas of her biography writing, but it lacks a critical and analytical approach to her literary works that remain bound to the Arabic context with the absence of translations. Ziadeh's literary writings are overlooked, and she herself is overshadowed, misrepresented, and reduced to two matters: love and madness. Until today, there are few critical studies on Ziadeh's contributions to the social and literary movements in Egypt particularly and in the Middle East more generally. This being said, my research is central in carving out a new space for Ziadeh's input through my close reading of *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* in comparison with Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Ziadeh herself knew that she was not given the literary worth she deserves as she wrote "Someday, someone will do me justice". Through my efforts of recovering her through translation and comparison in this project, I hope to contribute to giving her justice.



## CHAPTER II

### IN THE SHADOWS OF MODERNISM

#### A. The Four Ws of Modernism

Ever since the rise of its scholarship, the literary movement of modernism has been synonymous with the West: Scholars, researchers, and readers engaged with modernist studies would first think about the big names: James Joyce, T.S Eliot, and Virginia Woolf. For a very long time, these prominent writers, among other western ones, assumed their place in the pantheon of modernist icons. However, global modernism seeks to prove that western modernism is not the whole story of modernity; but a part of it. Its long-acknowledged role as a leading force in modernism should no longer be the case, or so is hoped, with the “wake of the field’s unprecedented expansion” (Hayot and Walkowitz, 1).

To destabilize what is meant by modernism, Wollaeger asserts in his introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* that four questions must be carefully considered: the when, where, what, and whys of modernism (7). In this comparative study of Ziadeh and Woolf, I first examine and challenge the question of where. In other words, I reconsider the geographies of modernism, implying that looking beyond the dominant Western geography is an essential step that allows the expansion and inclusion of new languages and agents of modernity. Specific to this study, I consider May Ziadeh as a long-neglected agent of modernity as compared to the iconic figure of Woolf, and Arabic as a long-excluded language when compared to the dominant European languages of modernity. As Hayot and Walkowitz claim in *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*, modernist studies are now engaging with works produced in spaces

“throughout the world” rather than solely engaging with European productions (1). Hence, the question of modernity outside the European Center has gained prominence in recent decades, allowing more space for modernism to be read and studied from a global lens rather than the previous limiting scope.

Breaking from the Eurocentric geography of modernism thus answers the “where” question, leaving three more questions as we set out to destabilize our long-rooted understanding of modernism. When it comes to the question of when, or the time/s of modernism, Susan Stanford Friedman rightly points out in her article “Periodizing Modernism” what follows,

Rethinking the periodization of modernism requires abandoning what I have called the “nominal” definition of modernity, a noun-based designation that names modernity as a specific moment in history with a particular societal configuration that just happens to be the conditions that characterize Europe from about 1500 to the early twentieth century. The “relational” mode of definition, an adjectivally-based approach that regards modernity as a major rupture from what came before, opens up the possibility for polycentric modernities and modernisms at different points of time and in different locations. (426)

Friedman’s attentiveness to the variety of modernities that can be explored across time as well as space is relatively new; particularly dating back to the past decade and coinciding with the rise of the field of global modernism. Adopting her relational mode of definition, I define my focus in this study on the modernisms of the early twentieth century in Egypt and Britain while being aware that many other modernisms emerge at different times and places. As such, I limit the scope of my study to the period and locations abovementioned for the purpose of comparing what modernism and feminism meant for Ziadeh and Woolf who were writing from Cairo and London in the 1920s. Building upon that frame, respatializing the modernism movement beyond Europe moves the research forward to

include that of Egypt in the same period; allowing me as such to consider the “whys” and “what” of modernism.

As briefly mentioned above, comparison is a major motif for this study and is regarded as a principal tool in the emerging field of global modernism. As Friedman puts it, “to be global in reach, modernist studies will have to become more comparative” (504). However, the nature of comparison itself is carefully considered in studies of global modernism. Most prominently, the call for shifting away from diffusionist modes of comparison, that is “the idea that modernism began in the West and then moved to rest,” is manifested in global modernism; favoring on the contrary decentered and non-hierarchical comparisons (Hayot and Walkowitz 3). Building upon this theoretical background, my study selects comparative strategies from the field of global modernism to allow comparing Al Nahda, the Arab Awakening movement, on equal footing with the western modernism away from the dominant hierarchical encounter of the latter as “the One” and Al Nahda’s as “the Other”. As such, my answer to the “what” question is dependent on the where, when, and whys of modernism.

To define the modernism of this study is to consider the possibility for polycentric modernisms while selecting two of those, namely Al Nahda and the Western movements, occurring at a specific time in the early twentieth century and in different locations in Egypt and Britain for the purpose of comparison. In this context, comparing *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* with *A Room of One’s Own* allows us to think of these texts neither as “singular instances of modernist innovation nor as particularly reactionary” but rather as examples of global debates about modernism and feminism during the early twentieth century (Bush 83). As these texts are put in conversations with each other, the following questions emerge as motives for comparison: What changes about the concept and practices of

modernism as it travels across space? And what remains the same? Considering that the term “feminism” was still in the making during that period, how did Ziadeh and Woolf conceptualize feminism? Where did they meet in this process, and where did their roads in writing diverge?

In asking these questions, I contribute to “offering more complex trajectories” that compile modernist movements on a planetary scale rather than being confined to the singular European story of modernity (Mitchell xx). Nonetheless, this doesn’t imply that Europe is not an important site of cultural production. Coming back to the “where” question of modernism, Europe still occupies a significant place on the new global map, but it is no longer the ideal, aspired, and exclusive site of modernity. Thinking through its field, global modernism allows us to read modernism and feminism not only from Woolf’s perspective from the heart of the British Empire, but also from Ziadeh’s lens and words, positioned in the periphery of the world, yet at the center of Egypt, Cairo. In other words, approaching modernism from a global perspective that surpasses Eurocentrism allows me to “trespass freely”, if I were to borrow Woolf’s words (125), from the west to the east in search for common grounds between these two writers while preserving the uniqueness of their political, cultural, and linguistic contexts. This shift away from the singular Eurocentric narrative opens up space for research to lean more towards other, and often othered, cultures and conceptions. And although my comparative study aims to decenter, I am aware that the terms “center” and “periphery” still matter in comparativity. This becomes most evident as I argue that recovering Ziadeh who wrote from the periphery in Egypt requires much more effort than revisioning Woolf who wrote from the British Empire, the center.

To structure the comparison between *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* and *A Room of One's Own*, I have chosen two keywords that both Ziadeh and Woolf make use of in these texts and that also fall under the framework of this study: global modernism. Inspired by *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*, a book that introduces new pathways and frameworks for literary and cultural analysis through working around a set of concepts, I inhabit some of these concepts and also “upend them, alter them for (my) private use, and most importantly, change and perhaps someday replace them with words of (my) own” (9). In that, I adopt and alter Hayot and Walkowitz’s concept of “tradition”, and add in this my comparative study the keyword “shadow” as a new term to think through global modernism and women’s writing. The first keyword to lead the comparison between the two texts is “shadow”, a recurrent word and theme traceable in Ziadeh and Woolf’s writings on women’s status in the early twentieth century. However, before diving into the manifestation of “shadow” in their texts, it is important to first set them in context and to point out the shadowing of these writings in modernist studies.

## **B. The Shadows of Modernism**

### ***1. Invading Patriarchal Modernity***

#### **a. Feminist Revisions of Virginia Woolf**

Not only has modernity been centered on and limited to Europe, but it has also been treated as a male-dominated academy. Hence, to talk about Woolf as an iconic modernist figure whose name is synonymous with literary innovation, wasn’t always the case. As Madelyn Detloff declares in “Iconic Shade ... and Other Professional Hazards of Woolf Scholarship”, Woolf’s mark on modernism was regarded as “unworthy of the attention” and shadowed by male contemporary writers of her time like T.S Eliot and

James Joyce (2). Invaders of patriarchal modernity were then the scholars who “listened closely to the texts, the histories, and the archive” and who “brought to the light writers and artists languishing in the shadows of great men,” leading up gradually to a secure place for Woolf in modernism (Delsandro 12). Wollaeger coins these efforts as “feminist revisions,” asserting that they date back to the 1970s when Woolf thrived and “reentered discussions of modernism” (8). Revision, a comparative strategy in global modernism suggested by Friedman, is defined as “the act of looking back” and “seeing with fresh eyes” something that is different from how one has seen before (Friedman 508).

Hence, Woolf’s words that were once regarded as unworthy of attention were then revisioned through the fresh lens of modernist and feminist scholars nearly half a century afterwards. Their revision succeeded not only in bringing back Woolf’s name in modernist studies, but also in centralizing her as a canonical figure to the extent that Detloff, who is a Woolf scholar, was once asked: “But don’t you have Woolf fatigue?” (2). Arguing against this critical question, she writes: “For me, Woolf was not always canonical, not always part of the institution of literary or modernist studies... I have a vague recollection of when Virginia Woolf became canonical—sometime in the early 1990s when studies of modernism could no longer omit her without explanation” (2-3). Accordingly, the recent feminist revisions of Woolf in scholarship succeeded in trespassing the patriarchal shade of modernism.

b. Recovering May Ziadeh

Although Ziadeh and Woolf share this common ground of being marginalized women writers in the male-oriented field of modernism, I argue that Ziadeh’s recovery is much more complicated than Woolf’s. In defining recovery, which is another

comparative strategy, Friedman emphasizes its critique of “the invisibility of cultural production outside the culture capitals of the West in modernist studies” (510). As its archeological metaphor is borrowed from feminist criticism, recovery perfectly operates in my attempt to explore the multiple layers of shadowing Ziadeh on political, cultural, and linguistic levels. This reemphasizes my argument that Ziadeh’s marginal status is more complicated than Woolf’s: Woolf wrote from the British Empire (or the center) while Ziadeh wrote from the colonized periphery in Egypt. Although both shared the patriarchal culture as a common ground, the latter was the only barrier that stood in the face of acknowledging Woolf’s modernity when revisioned. However, I believe that this cultural barrier wasn’t the only one for Ziadeh.

Before moving on to other layers of shadowing Ziadeh, it is important to elaborate on the cultural barrier in the Egyptian scene in order to “avoid homogenizing the local in the name of universal modernism” (Wollaeger 14). As Al Araj points out in his lecture entitled “May Ziadeh- al- ḥadātha al- ma‘tūba wa Ma’ālāt Al-kitāba” (May Ziadeh: Flawed Modernism and the Functions of Writing)”, Ziadeh’s vibrant female voice was silenced among other male intellectuals of her time despite her significant input to Al Nahda movement. Stated right from the lecture’s title, Al Araj accounts Arab modernism as a flawed and defective one where its male pioneers held a social and intellectual war against Ziadeh specifically when they supported the accusation of her madness. Considering the originality of Ziadeh’s premises, both in her writings and engagement with the public sphere, the patriarchal hierarchy was in danger. Ziadeh didn’t only invade patriarchy as a writer, translator, magazine editor and an orator, but also as the literary hostess of one of the most famous literary salons in the Arab world during the early twentieth century (Al Araj). Hence, the lack of support from her male peers when

admitted to the psychiatric ward of the American University of Beirut in January 1938 is not surprising when read from this lens. On the contrary, it was a perfect moment to strip a woman like Ziadeh who crossed the lines of the accepted and expected inferior female role at that time.

Although Ziadeh was excluded from the Arab modernist scene, Al Araj's work manifests an interest in bringing her name back to Al Nahda, which acts as a starting point for recovering her in the Arabic context. Unlike Woolf, Ziadeh's iconicity and her writings boosted during Al Nahda but died down shortly afterwards. While Woolf's name is today recognized worldwide and put on equal footing with her male contemporary writers, Ziadeh is not yet given the recognition she deserves despite being one of the better-known women writers in the Arab world. This becomes most evident especially when compared to the attention her contemporary male writers enjoy as their contributions to the Nahda movement are iconized and extensively studied<sup>1</sup>. In turn, and following the feminist revisionary project that has once enabled Woolf to earn the iconic status she currently enjoys, my research on Ziadeh can now enable her to acquire this status that she too deserves. By looking back at Ziadeh and reading her contributions with fresh eyes, I contribute to adding a global lens to our conception of modernism that transcends patriarchal, political, and linguistic shades.

In an effort to recover Ziadeh beyond the Arab literary scene, I set her significant yet understudied modernist motifs on equal par with Woolf's modernism. This attempt in itself aims to surpass two other shadows that stand in the way of recovering Ziadeh; namely the political and the linguistic. As previously said, Ziadeh and Woolf were both

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these studies on male Nahda writers include, but are not limited to, books on Abd al-Rahman al Kawakibi, Ahmad Faris al-Shaydiak, Butrus al-Bustani, Ibrahim al- Yaziji, Jamal al-Dine Afghani, and Muhammad Abduh. When referring to that period, the names aforementioned are celebrated as "al-Nahda Pioneers".



shadowed by the dominant patriarchy, but Ziadeh's mark on global modernism was also absent because of her marginal spatial position in Egypt. Unlike Woolf who wrote from the heart of the British Empire which has always been an important center of modernist studies, Ziadeh wrote from the context of colonized Egypt whose modernism is less acknowledged globally. As Mitchell says, it is still believed today that "to become modern... is to act like the West" (1). This reductive and diffusionist paradigm conflictly positions non-European regions as passive recipients of the "more advanced and modern" West, which was the case with the Nahda in Egypt. Especially because Egypt was colonized by Britain when its modernity sprung, Al Nahda was seen as a delayed modernist movement that looked up to the European model. However, a global modernist scholar like Michael Allan refutes in his book *In The Shadow of World Literature* this hierarchal reading. Instead, he argues that the literary movement of 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt is not "simply imported from modern European history" and doesn't "fit neatly" within this broad story (11). Coming back to the title of this chapter, "In the Shadows of Modernism", I draw inspiration from Allan's critical approach towards the field of world literature while adjusting my focus on the multiple shadows of global modernism.

## **2. Ziadeh Coins an Early Vision of Global Modernism**

Ziadeh demonstrated a keen awareness of the superior approach to the Egyptian Nahda movement and that of the Arab World more generally; showcasing as such an early vision of Global Modernism that sets to compare the Western and Nahda movements on equal par. To understand the nature of Ziadeh's writings and her role in the Nahda, it is important to situate her within the political context in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century, starting from the historical fact that Egypt was colonized by Britain from 1882 till 1914. The overlap between the Nahda movement, the call for modernity, and the colonial period is not coincidental. As Tignor (2015) claims in “The British Occupation of Egypt,” little attention has been directed to the patterns of social change and problems of modernization that developed within the colonial context, suggesting that Egypt offers “an ideal example of a case study of cultural contact and change under colonial rule” (7). In that, it is significant to point out that the major motif to invade Egypt was to defeat the Urabi revolt, a proto-nationalist movement that “threatened the security of Britain’s major route to the East, the Suez Canal” (11). However, what started off as an intertwine between economic and political British motives to colonize Egypt has then transformed into a motive of ideological change under the name of modernity. As Tignor further argues, the export of European ideas into Egypt affected “the foundations of traditional Egyptian society” where patterns of social change were gradually beginning to appear (10). These remarks however don’t imply that Egypt’s Nahda has been an outcome, or an image of, the British modernity. Nonetheless, they do entail that the massive cultural exchange aided by translation, technological development, and the spread of the printing press has been an agency of social change in Egypt, and specifically of women’s emancipation movement and national consciousness.

In *Kalimāt au Ishārāt*, Ziadeh criticizes the Western judgement of Arab nations as declined and uncivilized ones, reminding her audience in Lebanon at the time that the advancement of civilization “took its first step here (on the Phoenician coasts), and from here the principles of science and the arts, industry and commerce, were all carried to Greece, to the Romans, and to the world” (12). With a firm objection against hierarchal approaches towards the East and in a Nahdawi tone, she continues,

لقد قال عنّا أهل الغرب ما قالوا فدعهم يفترون! إن لكل أمة خطة سنّتها أقدار الحياة، وكل ما في الكون متموّج الى الأبد... وكذا أحوال الشعوب تصعد وتنحدر، ترتقي وتنحطّ، تتقدم وتتقهقر... توقّف الشرق زمناً فقال الغرب: "هوذا الشرق في سبات عميق يشبه الموت". لكن لم يلبث أن نفض الشرق عنه أكفان الهوان ونهض نهضة أدهشت من كان يحسبنا في غفوة لا تعقبها يقظة... والخلاصة: إنّ المطّلع على تاريخنا منذ نصف قرن، يعلم أن الفرق بين ما كنا عليه وصرنا إليه كبير. (زيادة ١٣-١٤)

The Westerns said what they said about us, so let them fabricate! Every nation has a plan driven by the destinies of life, and everything in this universe fluctuates forever... Likewise, the conditions of nations rise and fall, ascend and descend, advance and retreat... The East stopped for a while so the West said: "Here lies the East in a deep slumber that looks like death." But it was not long until the East lifted the shrouds of shame away with an awakening that astonished those who thought we were in a deep sleep, one that would not be succeeded by an awakening... The conclusion is: Those who investigate our history from half a century ago realize that the difference between what we were then and what we have become now is great. (Ziadeh 13-14)

Ziadeh's regard of the advancement that the countries of the East have accomplished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries iterate her belief in a real awakening that she herself was dynamically involved in. Although she rightly criticizes the fall of the Arab nation at a certain period, she nonetheless emphasizes that the early beginnings of civilization were on the Phoenician coasts, centralizing in this way their contribution to the Western culture and its later modernity. Arguing against the widespread ideology of a more progressive West that bestowed modernism on its colonized objects, Ziadeh questions in *Al-Ahrām* newspaper <sup>2</sup>(The Pyramids) the European claim of "modernizing the globe" (5). Answering back to the following question which she later proposes: "Do these countries really share one single modernity?", Ziadeh writes,

كلّا! لم يُخلق العالم لمدينة واحدة، ولا وُجدت الانسانية لطابع واحد تدمغ به وقالب فرد يخلق عناصرها. الانسانية كائن عام تتعاون في تأليفه جميع الشعوب المتحضرة منها والبدوية على السواء. والمدنيّة- وما هي

<sup>2</sup> Founded in the year 1875 in Cairo by Lebanese brothers Bishara and Salim Takla.

إلا تطوّر بني الإنسان - لا بد أن يتعاون على ايجادها واستكمالها جميع الشعوب كل من ناحيته وفي بابه.  
(زيادة ٨)

The world was not made for one modernity, nor was humanity invented for a single imprinted trait or an individual mold that stifles its elements. Humanity is a universal being in which all civilized and nomadic peoples alike cooperate in its creation. Nations should come together in finding and forming modernity, that is nothing but the evolution of human beings, where each nation engages from its own perspective. (Ziadeh 8)

Before highlighting the significance of this passage in surpassing the political shadow of the West on other nations, I find it necessary to justify my choice of translating *tamaddun* as modernity. While its literal meaning in Arabic translates to urbanization, civilization, or being civilized, Abu-'Uksa argues in "Imagining modernity: the language and genealogy of modernity in nineteenth-century Arabic" that nineteenth-century Arabic-speaking scholars, among them May Ziadeh, "imagined modernity through use of the term *tamaddun*." He continues, "During this period *tamaddun* was constructed as a comprehensive theory that comprised all aspects of human life: ethical, religious, social, economic, political and cultural" (672). Hence, when taking into account that Ziadeh was writing in times of modernity in Egypt, and that the Nahda movement is regarded as a modernist one, I find it relevant to translate *tamaddun* as modernity.

Criticizing the European story that holds itself responsible for globalizing the globe, Ziadeh advocates for a global making of the term "modernity" that transcends the political and superior shade of the West on Egypt. This is evident in the abovementioned passage and particularly when she calls all nations to engage in the creation of modernity project while simultaneously respecting and welcoming their different contributions. As Ziadeh argues, these different inputs from diverse nations and cultures could produce

multiple modernisms that steer away from the single European mold that “stifles its elements” (Ziadeh 8).

In coining this vision of global modernism, Ziadeh argues for respatializing and decentering the movement in an attempt to overstep the political Eurocentric shadow. Coming back to recovering Ziadeh then, what remains as a roadblock is the linguistic barrier exemplified through the absence of any translations of her work. As Damrosch argues, a work becomes “reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts” (24). And although she herself was a translator, none of Ziadeh’s works were ever translated, which prevents their circulation beyond the Arabic context in which they are even overlooked. While a large majority of Nahda texts have been translated, to mention Ahmad Fares Al Shidyaq as one example among many, the lack of Ziadeh’s texts in translation is telling. Taken together, this linguistic burden, in addition to the cultural and political ones, obstruct recovering Ziadeh and bringing her name to the table of global modernist discussions. As Gayle Rogers writes, in importing non-Western materials into the metropole through mechanisms of translation, we “reinforce their exoticism, their unknowability in their source language, and that language’s distance from our more familiar target languages” (248). On this basis, I regard my translation work in this project as a significant starting point for a growing interest in circulating Ziadeh’s works to recover her in the Arabic and global scenes of modernity. At the same time, it contributes to the inclusion of Arabic language among other languages of modernism that have been and still are predominantly European.

### C. Patriarchal Shadows in Times of Modernism: A Close Reading

As defined by Cambridge Dictionary, a shadow is “an area of darkness caused by light being blocked by something”. When reading *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* and *A Room of One’s Own*, the use of the term “shadow”, in addition to other words that cluster around it, is traceable. Some of these recurrent words in both texts are: “profound shadows, caves, shades, darkness, cover, obscurity” that are also read in opposition to their antonyms “torch, candles, light, half lights, sunlight”. Analyzed through the lens of global modernism, I argue that “shadow” becomes a keyword and theme that Ziadeh and Woolf draw on to represent women’s status in the early twentieth century. I then read their writings on shadows and their engagement with the public sphere and literary groups/circles as instances of performance that aimed to trespass the patriarchal shadows in Egypt and Britain respectively.

To start with, Ziadeh’s adoption of the word “shadow” is much more extensive and abundant as compared to Woolf. While Woolf uses the term eight times throughout the whole book, Ziadeh integrates it in more than fifteen passages, not to mention other similar terms that are associated with it. In most of these cases, she does address the shadowing of women by men like Woolf does, but she also connects “shadows” to the wider scale of her Egyptian society that needs the light of education to get out of the shadows of ignorance. In one of her lectures, Ziadeh writes, “the society here is a repository of darkness and ignorance” (75). Concerned with spreading the education of girls that many of her liberal Nahdawi colleagues shared, she continues,

وأما الجهل فظلام، والظلام لا يهدم الا بتغلب النور. النور! النور! نريد النور دوما وفي كل مكان!  
نريد أن يفهم الرجل كرامة المرأة، ونريد أن تفهم المرأة كرامة الانسانية! (زيادة ٧٦)

But ignorance is darkness, and this darkness can only be destroyed when light prevails. We need light at all times and everywhere! We want men to understand the dignity of women, and women to understand the dignity of humanity! (Ziadeh 76)

In this passage for instance, Ziadeh observes ignorance as darkness that casts its shade on the Egyptian society. However, this darkness is contrasted by the light of education, which according to Ziadeh is an essential need at any time and in every place. In this sense, she denotes the universality of her argument that becomes convenient to other time periods and geographies beyond Egypt. When the light of education prevails, women can understand “the dignity of humanity” (76). Therefore, they understand their dignity and roles as active members in their modern communities, securing their place outside the shadows of ignorance and patriarchy.

*“And there she settled down in the shadow of the world’s disapproval.” (Woolf 34)*

When it comes to Woolf, she handles the keyword “shadow” in certain contexts that always relate to the shadowing of women by the male-dominated society. In the quote abovementioned, which carries a universal trait, Woolf describes the status of one of her fictional characters who has “settled down in the shadow of the world’s disapproval” (34). And although Woolf’s character is fictional, she clarifies to her audience, and later her readers, on the first page of her book that “fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact” (1). This claim perfectly suits her description of the societal shadow on women’s movement in the early twentieth century, which is a theme that runs in the whole book reaching her final chapter, chapter six. There, Woolf describes another fictional character, whom she names Phoebe, in the following manner,

It is a woman... I thought, watching Phoebe, for that was her name, coming across the beach. Then Alan got up and the shadow of Alan at once obliterated Phoebe. For Alan had views and Phoebe was quenched in the flood of his views. (74)

The literal shadowing of Phoebe, a woman, by Alan, a man, carries underneath it another figurative sense that represents on a wider scale the concealment of women who disappear in the shades of men. Obliterated by the shadow of Alan, Woolf can no longer watch Phoebe. And although “Alan had views,” marking more generally her perspectives, attitudes, and visions, these were all “quenched” and suppressed by the oppressive floods of Alan’s views (74). This centrality of “shadow” is mirrored in Ziadeh’s writings who rather utilizes similes and metaphors to describe the shadowing of women by men. In one of the lectures of *Kalimāt au Ishārāt*, titled “Al-mar’a wa al-tamaddun” (Women and Modernity), Ziadeh writes,

الأزهار، تلك المخلوقات العجيبة التي لا تراها نفس حساسة الا وتشعر بأنها ازاء سر غامض ... على أن الوقت ليل، ورداء الظلام يحجب عن النواظر وضوح الأشياء. والأزهار التي تفتح في النهار وريقاتها... تنكمش لمامسة الليل، لأن رطوبة الليل تذبها. ولكنني سأبدلها بزهرة... تلك الزهرة التي يعذبها ظمأ الحرية، وتتجاذبها العواصف، وتتقاذفها صرعات الزمان منذ أجيال طوال، فلا ينقصف غصنها ولا يلتوي... لقد عرفتم تلك الزهرة العجيبة، هي المرأة! (زيادة 30-31)

Oh flowers, those marvelous creatures that induce every sensitive soul that sees them to feel close to a mysterious secret... However, the time is night, and its darkness obscures the clarity of things. And the flowers that open their leaves during the day...close them as the night approaches, for the humidity of the night withers them. But I will replace these flowers with only one... that flower is tormented by the desire for freedom, hurled by storms, and tossed by the battles for a long time, but its branch does not break or even twist... You have known that fantastic flower, it is the woman!( Ziadeh 30-31)

In this passage, which marks the introduction to Ziadeh’s lecture, Woolf’s scene of Alan’s shadow that at once “obliterated Phoebe” is symbolized more poetically in Ziadeh’s description of the flower and its conditions. While the darkness or the shade of



the night “obscures the clarity of things,” Ziadeh describes women as fantastic and strong warriors who are propelled by the cultural and patriarchal battles. Nonetheless, they still succeed in preserving their will to survive, just like the flower who yearns for freedom and whose branch “does not break or even twist” (30). This theme of an oppressive society that casts its shadows on women is reproduced in another lecture for Ziadeh. Rhetorically, she asks: “So what shall she say, she who was compelled to struggle for subsistence and in search of a place for herself in the sunlight amid the crowdedness of this frightening and presumptuous society?” (69). Again and again, the theme of shadowing women plays a major motif in Ziadeh’s lectures. In the passage abovementioned, this shadow is set in opposition with women’s search of an individual “place for herself in the sunlight” to get out from the darkness and crowdedness of a “frightening” patriarchal society (69).

The recurrent keyword that constitutes a theme of “shadow” is further established in Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Although both Ziadeh and Woolf analyze women’s conditions in the early twentieth century through it, Woolf also uses this theme to introduce an unusual idea at her time through a fictional woman writer, Mary Carmichael. As Woolf sets to read Carmichael’s book “Life’s Adventures”, she is struck by the following sentence “Chloe liked Olivia”. To Woolf, this represents an immense change in literature where women have traditionally been “almost without exception... shown in their relation to men” and never to other women (61). Thinking about this significant and original turn that she introduces in fiction-form, Woolf continues,

For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping...For I wanted to see how Mary Carmichael set to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and coloured light of the other sex. ... She will need to hold her breath, I said, reading on, if she is to do it; for women are... so terribly accustomed to concealment and suppression...What happens when Olivia--this organism that has been under the shadow of the rock these million years--feels the light fall on it, and sees coming her way a piece of strange food--knowledge, adventure, art.(62-63)

As evident in this narration of Carmichael's journey, a rich chain of the lexical field (both synonyms and antonyms) that gather around the keyword "shadow" is identifiable. While "shadow" is literally mentioned three times in this passage, there are also the lights, half lights, torches, and candles that are contrasted with vast chambers, profound shadows, concealment and suppression, as well as serpentine caves. This challenging journey of a fictional woman writer symbolizes the actual hardships that women writers like Ziadeh and Woolf endure especially as they approach the male-dominated world of writing with original ideas. Ziadeh's image of a flower yearning for individual freedom in the sunlight is similar to Woolf's description of the hardships Carmichael faces as she initiates a light in "that vast chamber where nobody has yet been" (62). Left alone, women in both contexts try to step out from "the shadow of the rock" and break free from the traditional concealment they have been accustomed to.

Hence, although they acknowledge women's long history of oppression, Ziadeh and Woolf produce a positive and promising present where women search for a place of their own in the lights despite the hardships and profound shadows. In one of Ziadeh's lectures from *Kalimāt au Ishārāt*, the opening lines read as follows,

كنت لابسة أثواب الحداد فاستبدلتها لأقف أمامكم. انما يلبس السواد حزنا على الموتى. لكن الأمة التي تنبض فيها حياة جديدة تدفعها الى تقدير كرامة المرأة: تلك الأمة لا يجوز لفتياتها لبس السواد، بل خليق بهن أن يتشحنن بالبياض النقي، لون الصفاء والسعادة والهناء. (زيادة ١٠٤)

I was wearing a mourning dress, but I replaced it to stand before you, for black is worn to mourn the dead. But in a nation where a new life pulse pushes for appreciating the dignity of women, women should not wear black. Rather, they are worthy of being dressed in pure white, the color of serenity, happiness, and contentment. (Ziadeh 104)

Progressing in the same framework that clusters around the “shadow” motif, Ziadeh reflects on and performs the act of dressing white as a symbol of serenity and happiness. In her eyes, women of the Egyptian nation should no longer wear black and mourn their past with all its shadows. Rather, they should celebrate the pulse of a new cultural life that appreciates and respects “the dignity of women” (104).

#### **D. Coming Out from the Shadows**

As discussed earlier, both Ziadeh and Woolf recognize the patriarchal shadows they encounter as women, and particularly as women writers. However, I argue that they not only recognize these shadows but also trespass them on multiple levels, starting from the mere fact that they write about these shadows. While their modernist attempt to rewrite and reconstruct history will be extensively discussed in the next chapter, it is worth noting here in this analysis of breaking free from the shadows. Keeping their writing motif in mind, what’s peculiar about Ziadeh’s *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* and Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* is their original form as public lectures. These women writers did not only invade the male-dominated world of publishing and writing, but also the public sphere traditionally designated for men. Hence, in engaging with the public domain

through oration and public lectures as means to express their sentiments, both writers had a pioneering and original role in challenging social norms in the early twentieth century.

When it comes to Ziadeh, many of her lectures in *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* were addressed to a mixed audience of men and women in various clubs and societies in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Thus, lecturing this diverse audience in genders and spaces expands the reachability of Ziadeh's advocacy for women's emancipation and modernism. This subsequently proves her dynamic yet understudied involvement in the Nahda movement and specifically in modeling modern social and cultural norms in the 1920s. As for Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* was primarily addressed to a women-only audience at women's constituent colleges at the University of Cambridge. However, the significant element of public engagement is still there, and like Ziadeh, it acted as a doorway for further circulation of Woolf's feminist and modernist premises. Coming out of the shadows of silence and suppression, both writers took an extra step to perform their arguments in public rather than being bound to the private world of writing.

Further performances that trespass the shadows of the 1920s are manifested in Ziadeh and Woolf's involvement in literary salons and circles, and I emphasize the significance of these spaces for circulating, accessing, and accumulating knowledge for women in the early twentieth century. To start with Ziadeh, she was famously known for founding and successfully leading Tuesday's Literary Salon at her home in Egypt for almost twenty years. As Khaldi argues in *Egypt Awakening in the Early Twentieth Century: Mayy Ziyādah's Intellectual Circles*, Ziadeh's salon played a prominent role in Egypt's Nahda. Taking into account that it was the first literary salon to welcome both men and women, Khaldi reads it as a revolutionary space for gender equality and freedom of speech. Ziadeh's Salon gained popularity among intellectuals, authors and poets who

gathered every week to discuss their literary works as well as social and philosophical topics. Some of these attendees include, but are not limited to, Salama Moussa, Taha Hussein, Salim al-Bustani, Huda Sha'arawi, Amy Khair, Haram Shakur Basha, Ahmed Shawqi, and many others names from Nahdawi intellectuals (Kozbari 290-291).

In addition, Ziadeh's Salon also welcomed foreign visitors, among them the American writer Henry James and his brother William James who was a philosopher, historian, and psychologist (Kozbari 313). As Kozbari further reports, a delegation of Indian writers has also visited the salon, delivering on their next visit a poem from Tagore, a well-known Bengali poet, that expresses his appreciation of Ziadeh (313). In that, Ziadeh's Salon did not only produce an accessible space for sharing thoughts among national intellectuals, but also for circulating and accumulating knowledge among other writers across the globe, marking again her unique vision of global modernism.

On the other side of the world, Woolf, like Ziadeh, was also the hostess for the Thursday evenings' discussion group of writers, artists, and critics. As retrieved from Tate's archives, Woolf was described as "an active member of London's social and literary circles throughout her life". Therefore, what is famously known today as Bloomsbury group initially started as discussion circles at Woolf's London house where intellectuals discussed aesthetic, philosophical, and social questions and supported each other's literary and artistic activities. E.M Foster, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, Leonard Woolf, as well as many other writers and artists were members of the Bloomsbury group. As Wendy Hitchmough writes in *The Bloomsbury Look*, the complex and shifting dynamics of this group "encouraged and enabled its members to step outside the conventions of their time and to innovate" (7). Compared with other groups at the time, the Bloomsbury Group was "uniquely successful" in forging new directions for

“twentieth-century culture and society” (7-8). Continuing for almost thirty years, Woolf’s literary group, like Ziadeh’s Salon, highly contributed to the development of modern culture, arts, and literature. However, what marks Ziadeh’s Salon as different from and perhaps richer than Woolf’s circle is the cross-national pin that transcends the geographical boundaries of Egypt. At the other side of the spectrum, that is Woolf, the discussions in Bloomsbury group among British intellectuals in central London remain purely and limitedly Eurocentric.

However, the privileged socio-economic background of Ziadeh and Woolf, as well as the attendees of their literary salon and circle respectively, remain an important component when reading these spaces. Whom did Ziadeh and Woolf address their feminist and modernist premises to? What kind of women did they aim to educate and create both personal and metaphysical rooms for? How were the power dynamics between the men and women of these discussions distributed? Until these questions are addressed, the legitimacy of these spaces as advocating for women’s empowerment remains unsettled. Nonetheless, the significance of Ziadeh’s Literary Salon and Woolf’s Bloomsbury Group in creating performative spaces is certainly admirable. The decision of transforming their private homes to spaces for welcoming the intellectual elite creates a tension between the rather traditional space for women and the realm of the outside world. Taken altogether, Ziadeh and Woolf’s writings and lectures on shadows, along with their engagement in literary salons and circles, produce influential and original attempts at trespassing patriarchal shadows of the early twentieth century in Egypt and Britain respectively.

## CHAPTER III

### TO RUPTURE FROM OR MODERNIZE TRADITIONS? AN UNFAMOUS DILEMMA

#### A. Traditions From a Global Modernist Lens

To trespass the patriarchal shadows meant to fight back against the grounds of tradition that have been deeply rooted in both Western and non-Western lands. Going back to the etymology of “tradition”, the sociologist Edward Shils says it comes from the Latin word *traditio*, derived from the verb *tradere*, a combination of *trans* (across) and *dare* (give), meaning to deliver or hand over (Shils 12). This process of handing over or transmitting tradition from one generation to another is not coincidental but is rather purposeful and decisive. As Shils argues, tradition includes “material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons or events, practices and institutions... It includes all that a society of a given time possesses and which already existed when its present possessors came upon it” (12). In the early twentieth century, when the modernism movement sprung on a global scale, the approach to tradition became controversial. However, the typical relationship between tradition and modernism is one of dialectical opposition and rupture where modernism meant, and still means, a break away from tradition. This widespread image remains limitedly Eurocentric where Western writers, including Virginia Woolf, expressed their understanding of modernism as a complete repudiation of the past and all its traditions.

To quote Woolf in her article “How It Strikes a Contemporary,” she writes, “No age can have been more rich than ours in writers determined to give expression to the differences which separate them from the past, and not to the resemblances which connect them with it.” This urge to express difference and disconnection from the past has been

the ruling definition of modernism as the antithesis of tradition. As Rachel Adams writes in “*A New Vocabulary of Global Modernism*,” specifically under his chapter entitled “Tradition”,

Spanning more than half a century, writing from varied political and aesthetic investments, these diverse authors all conceive of modernism as a decisive break with tradition. But despite their differences, they share a vision of modernism that operates within a strikingly circumscribed geographical frame, one centered on major European cities such as London, Paris, and Berlin. (233-234)

However, when revisiting this story from a global modernist perspective, new questions arise that open space(s) for other possible yet understudied non-Western approaches to tradition. If we were to widen the scope beyond familiar modernist geographies, how would tradition be defined, perceived, and studied? Does tradition hold the same meaning in western and non-western contexts in the early twentieth century? Is tradition necessarily paradoxical to and in contradiction with modernism? How does the writers’ positionality/context impact their relationship with tradition? And what about cultures that regard themselves as modern when insisting to protect their traditions? Are they seen as less modern in western eyes, and to what extent does this judgement matter? Specific to the focus of this study, I will be tackling these questions through the Egyptian milieu of modernism for Ziadeh in comparison with the British one for Woolf. The significance of this comparison lies in providing new insights on the concept of tradition and its conception, meaning, and function(s) from a global modernist perspective. This in its turn destabilizes the centrality of the European narrative of tradition vs. modernism through providing an alternative understanding of this relationship in the Egyptian locale in comparison with the British one.



“No one ever lived in antiquity,” writes David Damrosch, “People live only in the present, and in that sense every culture has always been modern at any given time” (43). However, our awareness of modernity is far from universal and is marked by the one and only western stamp, especially when it comes to tradition. To reclaim what tradition means on a global scale that includes the Western conception but is not entirely exclusive to it, tolerance towards different and multiple forms of modernity should be developed. As Damrosch continues,

Every landscape bears the traces, and the scars, of earlier eras, but these traces may be prominent or obscure...For some cultures, the distant past is no real issue: its echoes are faint, or they are rarely listened to. Conversely, the monuments and memories of the past can be pervasive, and people may feel closely connected to their ancestors, still fundamentally part of their spiritual and material world. To have a sense of oneself as a modern, however, depends on an active awareness of a premodern era that is understood to have been significantly different from one’s own time. In such circumstances, particular weight is often given to the foundational era of antiquity as a prime point of reference, whether for emulation or opposition or both, and so modernity can be said to emerge in dialectical relation to antiquity as its buried twin. (43)

As Damrosch points out, the distant past, and its traditions as I would add, is a controversial cultural topic. Taking tradition as a point of reference, Woolf views modernity as a rupture from it in search for “differences” which separate modern writers at her time, including herself, from traditions, “and not to the resemblances which connect them with it”. Woolf’s search for self-definition and representation against traditions is characterized by multiple layers, starting from language and stylistics. As famously known, her project of modernizing language is manifested through experimenting with styles and forms of expression. I further argue that it is framed in a rhetorical design that she adopts to craft her premises and defy patriarchal and linguistic traditions.

## B. A Rhetoric of Her Own

In defining rhetoric, George Kennedy describes it as "the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions" (Herrick 5). Kenneth Burke, one of this century's most famous rhetoricians and literary critics, contends that rhetoric "is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Burke 45). Within the context of these definitions, rhetoric becomes an instrument of socialization whereby everything that we do seems to be done for a purpose and in adaptation with a targeted audience. In that, it is only through the lens of rhetoric that I can identify Woolf as a rhetor who has architected a tactful and planned interplay of signs to communicate revolutionary and modern messages of empowerment and invention with her audience. I analyze her opposition to traditional styles of writing through the feminist criticism method which has "its roots in feminism, a social and political movement initiated to improve the lives of women," as Sonja K. Foss states in her book *Rhetorical Criticism, Exploration and Practices* (141).

Foss further claims that feminism is "often equated now with practices of disruption in general—practices that unsettle or challenge common assumptions, raise questions about traditional perspectives, and foster reconsideration of what has been taken for granted" (143). In this light, Woolf's text can utterly undergo a feminist rhetorical criticism, especially as I argue that she performs a rhetoric of disruption to her twentieth-century women audience. But how did Woolf perform this rhetoric? What rhetorical strategies did she resort to in transforming the ideology of tradition and patriarchal domination?

As my research suggests, Woolf's most effective rhetorical strategy in *A Room of One's Own* is the feminist strategy of cultivating ambiguity where "rhetors deliberately construct messages that are unclear, inexact, equivocal, and open to more than one interpretation" (Foss 148). Based on this definition, I argue that Woolf cultivates ambiguity about women's conditions through numerous rhetorical elements, the first being her nonlinear narrative style. To relate this style back to her scene, Woolf was a prime maker of modernism famously known for innovating the streams of consciousness method marked by the rejection of chronological continuity. However, her interruptive method, which has not attracted enough scholarly attention, is the special version of streams of consciousness, especially as the first sentence of her text starts by digression and interruption: "But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what, has that got to do with a room of one's own?" (Woolf 1).

One of Woolf's central premises – the need of a private room for women to write as signified in the title and introductory line - is mirrored in her nonlinear narrative style. With the absence of a private space solely for a woman, her thinking will constantly be interrupted within the dominant patriarchal ideology around. It is not a mere coincidence that Woolf starts her six-chaptered essay (and originally her speech) with the counter-argumentative conjunction "but". On the contrary, I argue that Woolf asserts a rhetorical and planned decision in starting her text this way, especially that she justifies to her audience that she is going "to develop in (their) presence as fully and freely as (she) can the train of thought that led (her) to think this", and that she will "give (them) her thoughts as they come to (her)" (3). These claims, set right from the introduction of her text, prepare the audience to expect a myriad of simultaneous thoughts that reflect a distracted state of mind. This distraction is marked by her interruptive narrative through the

excessive use of the word “but”, which is repeated each time the rhetor tries to raise a question about women’s conditions or formulate a coherent argument.

One of the many examples that echoes the rhetorical interruption of thoughts in *A Room of One’s Own*, and that simultaneously relates to modern writing styles, is the following, “But then one would have to decide what is style and what is meaning, a question which—but here I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself” (Woolf 4). Here, Woolf has already disengaged her audience from a previous claim and did so again in the same sentence with questions about style. Although she interrupts the new thought and shifts the audience’s attention to her locale at the library, the mere mention of style suggests its weight and significance at the time. She theorizes questions about style and simultaneously performs streams of consciousness as an innovative and experimental method that prevents narrative closure for any of her thoughts, which is another technique that rhetors adopt to create deliberately ambiguous messages (Foss 149). As evident above, Woolf’s uncertainty about style and meaning doesn’t lead to an answer but is rather disturbed by a completely new idea, leaving no emphasis to an expected yet an absent finishing endpoint.

This lack of narrative closure is thus manifested in Woolf’s text through the counter-argumentative conjunction “but” that presents strategically placed interruptions in service of representing women’s exclusion and oppression. As Allen Judith claims in “The Rhetoric of Performance in *A Room of One’s Own*”, “With the constant intrusion of but, the text simultaneously resonates with the multiple interruptions in women’s lives and the resultant openness created by these breaks” (58). Thus, the need for a private space is best illustrated in Woolf’s performance of the interruptions of thoughts that mirror the continuous interruptions in women’s lives. Woolf’s “but” resists narrative

continuity, cuts her thoughts off, and negates what she has just said only to begin a yet incomplete and disturbed thought that follows. Her two central premises, the need for financial independence and private space for women to write, are conflictly expressed as she chooses to perform the interruptions of her mind (through her discontinuous narrative style) that result from the lack of her two proposed conditions.

In exposing what is in her mind in such a digressive interruptive manner, Woolf's audience get access to her state of mind that "seems to have no single state of being" (72) and that is "always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives" (101). In this way, Woolf does not settle her audience on a hegemonic perspective about women's conditions but rather leaves them on the edge of experimenting and questioning desired expected ends. As Foss argues, the lack of closure contains "an invitation to openness- to imaginative possibility- that is not possible when a story is finished" (149). The multiple possibilities that arise from this rhetorical technique encourage women to explore their inventive and innovative nature in writing, which is an effective motif in Woolf's text that relates back to challenging and opposing stylistic traditions.

Through this innovation among many, Woolf participated in the modernism movement that fostered a period of experimentation in arts generally and in writing techniques in specific. She was deeply involved in this larger picture of experimental writing as she genuinely challenged mainstream modes of writing and violently ruptured from traditional methods in her concurrent search for new forms of expression.

### **C. A Different Approach to Modernizing Language**

Writing in times of national and political awareness in response to the British occupation in Egypt, aesthetic questions of writing for Ziadeh were leaning to more direct

and honest realistic depictions when compared to Woolf. The dominating social urge of people to redefine their roles in colonialism has largely impacted Ziadeh's usage of language. For her, the focus lied on the delivered message, or the content, more than trying out creative and innovative forms of deliverance. Hence, Ziadeh's language, like other modern Arab writers of her time, is simple, direct, and straightforward when compared to the heavy and complex diction adopted by pre-Nahda writers. When comparing Woolf's language to Ziadeh, I argue that Woolf has similarly adopted a direct style, but Ziadeh wasn't involved in experimenting with writing methods and techniques as Woolf was.

Nonetheless, Ziadeh did not stand in favor of a complete rupture from traditional Arabic style like Woolf and other European writers more generally did. Whereas they saw "their traditions shattered and dispersed," writers in Egypt emerged from their thirty-two years of British colonialism committed to reclaiming suppressed traditions (Adams 234). Coming back to Ziadeh, she adopted an interesting and moderate position on modernizing language; combining both her modern and nationalist urge to use direct language with the call to preserve and reclaim the richness of linguistic traditions before the Nahda movement. In her article titled "J āizat Nūbil Lisanat 1926 Tantazi'uha Yad Imra'a" (A Woman's Hand Seizes the 1926 Nobel Prize), which was published in *Al-Ahrām* newspaper on November 19, 1927, Ziadeh belatedly celebrates Grazia Deledda, the first Italian woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, and writes in the concluding paragraph:

نسجل هنا للمرأة فتحًا جديدًا وحافزًا ميمونًا لنساء العالم في سيرهنَّ إلى الأمام وفي الاعتراف من الثروة الإنسانية الكبرى، ثروة الفنِّ والفكر. ونزيد اقتناعًا، نحن حاملات القلم في مصر وفي الشرق العربي، بوجود الإقلاع عن العبارات المنسوخة، الاستعارات الجامدة والخواطر المتكررة... وكما أحسنت جراتزيا ديليدا، وكثيرات غيرها، استعمال لغتها الإيطالية العذبة التي لم يفقدها التطور المحتوم فخامة الصدى اللاتيني، وكذلك ليس عزيزًا علينا معشر الكاتبات من اليمين إلى الشمال، أن نحسن معالجة لغتنا العربية الجميلة محتفظات فيها على صدى المجد القديم وعاملات على الإبداع الشخصي الحديث في رسم صورة صادقة جذابة من مزاجنا النسوي وطبيعتنا الشرقية. (زيادة ٧٢)

We record here a new breakthrough and an auspicious stimulus for all the women of the world in their march forward and in the abundance of the great human wealth, the wealth of art and thought. We, the pen-carriers in Egypt and the Arab East, are more convinced of the necessity of abandoning copied phrases, rigid metaphors, and repetitive thoughts... Just as Grazia Deledda, and many others, made good use of her sweet Italian language without losing the magnificence of the Latin echo due to the inevitable modernity, so it is not dear to us, women writers, to improve our approach towards our beautiful Arabic language. Through preserving within it the echoes of ancient glory and working simultaneously on modern personal creativity, we paint an honest and attractive picture of our feminine mood and oriental nature. (Ziadeh 72)

Several critical notes are prone to interpretation in this passage, starting from Ziadeh's engagement with other cultures, languages, and literatures in times of massive cultural exchange. For Ziadeh, Deledda's winning of the Nobel Prize is a motivation for women writers from all over the world, and not only the Italians. It does bring national pride for them, but it also gives a global motive for women to contribute to the wealth of art and thought through writing. More importantly, she highlights not only the possibility but also the significance of preserving the traditions of a national language and its "ancient glory" while simultaneously working on modernizing it to suit the circumstances of the present moment (72). In other words, if Deledda could appreciate the power of her Italian linguistic traditions and tremendously succeed, then Arab women writers can follow this path, too. Ziadeh further cherishes Arabic language when describing it as a beautiful language, and her moderate stance towards linguistic traditions is established once again in her final sentence. There, she calls for preserving the traditions of Arabic

language and bringing together the echoes of its “ancient glory” with the creativity of the present. Taken together, Ziadeh treats these elements as rules or prerequisites of a moderate modern approach that emphasizes the positionality of Arab women writers when it comes to their “feminine mood and oriental nature” (72). Hence, in Ziadeh’s case unlike Woolf, traditions are not regarded as a burden that obstructs modernism, but as a force that pushes it forward against British colonial suppression.

#### **D. What to Hold onto and What to Leave Behind**

On another note, Ziadeh’s emphasis on the oriental nature of Arab women writers extends on a larger scale to tackle culture beyond the traditions of language. Evidently, she expresses these views in “The Woman’s Leader and the Common Cause” newspaper which was published in London on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1929. In her article entitled “The Awakening of Egyptian Womanhood (2),” she writes what follows,

In all schemes of reform, however, it should always be remembered that in spite of all that can be learned from other countries all that is good in Europe is not necessarily good in Egypt. Both in education and in social reform we need a clear vision of the real needs of our own country, and then the power to meet them in our own way. (Ziadeh 43)

A few things should be said to contextualize this passage, starting from the fact that it is part of an abridged translation from the original version written in Italian language and published in the *Oriente Moderno* journal. This article is also a continuation to a previous article Ziadeh published in May 1929, “The Awakening of Egyptian Womanhood (1),” where she tackles the three stages of “feminist awakening” in Egypt (41). Coming back to the abovementioned passage, Ziadeh’s call for selecting what to learn from Europe and what not reflects her larger thinking about cultural exchange and



resistance to colonial politics and Eurocentrism. In being critical about what fits the Egyptian model, Ziadeh further refutes notions of a reproduced, peripheral, and belated modernism movement in Egypt that looks up to the European model. As she writes, intellectuals at the time should recognize “Egypt’s own needs” instead of impulsively copying the Europeans’ and should then meet these needs in their own modern and oriental way (43). Relating this back to the “feminine mood and oriental nature” previously discussed, Ziadeh’s vision of a true renaissance brings together both traditions and modernism in harmony with each other, and not in opposition (72). She does encourage the opening to the occident and different cultures on the condition of not forgetting the oriental identity.

Considering that these articles were published in London shortly after Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* was published there too in text-form, I wonder: Did Ziadeh read Woolf’s text and respond to her through these articles? Similarly, did Woolf formulate an idea about modernism and feminist movements beyond London through reading Ziadeh? In this context, and as Bush writes, we might think of Woolf’s essay “neither as a singular instance of modernist innovation nor as particularly reactionary but rather as an example of global debates about tradition during that period” (Bush 83). Because we are accustomed to study Woolf’s modernist views within the European context, this original comparison with her contemporary Arab writer Ziadeh outside this sphere explores the global debates that Bush addresses and correspondingly revisits the long-established narrative on modernism as the antithesis of tradition.

Despite their distinct approaches to tradition, modernism for Ziadeh and Woolf is the antithesis of one facet of tradition: patriarchy. Writing in the early twentieth century, Woolf criticizes England’s cultural condition “under the rule of a patriarchy” both in the

bygone past and in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (24). She continues, “Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor” (24). This dominance of the professor, symbolizing on a larger scale that of patriarchy, has always been deeply rooted in different cultural traditions. On the other side of the world, Ziadeh too was criticizing these patriarchal traditions that stood in the face of emancipating women not only in Egypt, but in the whole world. Evidently, she writes in one of her lectures in *Kalimāt au Ishārāt*, titled “al-mar’a wa al-tamaddun,” (Women and Modernism) what follows,

المرأة! لقد جعلتها الهمجية حيواناً بيتياً، وحسبها الجهل متاعاً ممتلكاً للرجل يستعمله كيفما شاء، ويهجره اذا أراد، ويحطه اذا خطر له في تحطيمه خاطر... تاريخ المرأة استشهاده طويل، ومن أغرب الغرائب أنها لم تجد لها في القدم صديقاً ولا نصيراً. كانت عامة الشعب تكرهها وتحتقرها... لكنني أرى الأمر عجبياً، بل فظيلاً، من رجال نحسبهم نوابغ زمانهم وقادة أفكار العالم. (زيادة ٣٣)

Oh woman! Barbarism has made her a domestic animal, and ignorant people treated her as a possession of man who can use her as he wants, abandons her if he wants, and can even destroy her if he wants to ... The history of woman is a long martyrdom, and one of the strangest oddities is that she did not find her in ancient times one friend or a supporter. She was hated and despised by all people... But I find this approach strange, even horrible, of men whom we consider to be the genius of their time and the thinkers of the world. (Ziadeh 33)

To approve her argument, Ziadeh quotes patriarchal passages by Greek and Western philosophers whom she suspiciously refers to as “the thinkers of the world” (33). Going back in time to the seventeenth century in France, Ziadeh cites the French bishop and writer Jacques -Bénigne Lignel Bossuet who wrote, “a woman was born from a man’s extra rib, and for this reason she is sterile, with neither intelligence in her mind nor an awareness of her being” (Ziadeh 36). She further recalls the misogynistic attitude of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato who “spent his life in regret because he is the son of a

woman” (Ziadeh 34). Here, Ziadeh’s choice of citing patriarchal passages from Bossuet and Plato, along the ancient Greek tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides and the French Enlightenment writer Voltaire, is telling. On one hand, she showcases her openness to and knowledge of other cultures outside the Arabic context which ultimately proves her progressiveness as an Arab modern thinker during Al-Nahda. On the other hand, Ziadeh discusses patriarchal traditions as a global struggle across different periods of time and geographies. In this sense, she tackles traditions from a global modernist perspective which is an approach that distinguishes Ziadeh from Woolf. Although they both discredit patriarchal traditions, Woolf keeps her observations limited to England whereas Ziadeh includes Egypt but doesn’t limit her criticism to it. Contrasting this patriarchal past with her present moment in the early twentieth century, Ziadeh continues her lecture with an enthusiastic and optimistic tone towards “this new world where no traditions stand in the way of its success nor is it chained by old and outdated customs” (Ziadeh 31). Under her fourth subtitle “Lidhālīka Kānat al-madaniya ‘rjā’” (Why Modernism was Lame), she writes,

لننس هذه الأقوال العتيقة وللنظر إلى أحوال الحاضر. إنَّ النهضة النسائية تمتد يومياً في أقاصي المسكونة. إنها لنهضة عجيبة تبشر بخير عظيم وتنبئ بأنَّ مدنيّة الأُمس العرجاء التي لم تتكئ إلا على جنس من الجنسين، هي غير مدنيّة الرجل وحده، بل هي مدنيّة الإنسانيّة، لأن المرأة أخذة بالصعود إلى مركزها الحقيقي بقرب الرجل. (زيادة ٣٧)

Let’s forget these old sayings and observe our present conditions. The feminine renaissance expands everyday all over the world. It is a marvelous renaissance that promises great good and foretells that the lame modernism of yesterday, that relied upon one sex only, is reformed today as the woman ascends to her true position next to the man. (Ziadeh 37)

Ziadeh’s call for forgetting patriarchal traditions or “these old sayings” that have impeded modernism is linked to her call for equality between man and woman. Stepping away from a lame modernism that enforced the inferiority of woman by relying “upon

one sex only,” Ziadeh views the renaissance of the early twentieth century as a promising movement where women ascend to attain their equality with men (37). The previous tradition of looking down on women throughout history is more extensively described in Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and specifically through the deployment of metaphors that highly characterize the style of the text. Although there are numerous ways that Woolf adopts to draw different frames around the inferiority of women, I analyze her metaphors as significant tools that largely contribute to Woolf’s rhetoric of disruption that I previously discussed. Under this light, metaphors are no longer understood as mere decorations, but are analyzed as major devices to constitute reality, or in Woolf’s case, to reframe it. To exemplify, one of Woolf’s most illustrative metaphors in *A Room of One’s Own* reads as follows:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size...whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (Woolf 25)

In this metaphor, Woolf seeks to reframe the inferior status of women in the early twentieth century in stages, the quoted excerpt being the first. To this respect, Woolf’s metaphor uncovers the role of women throughout history as looking-glasses that serve to magnify the image of a man “at twice its natural size” (25). She then claims that violence and heroism are both linked with mirrors in a cause-effect relationship, tying this back to the necessity of maintaining the magnifying role on a daily basis in service of keeping the superiority of men and that of the traditional patriarchal ideology more generally.

Factualizing the role of women as reflectors and the power this role holds within is the first step in Woolf's rhetorical strategy of reframing, defined by Foss as "the process of shifting perspective to view a situation from a different vantage point" (150). As Foss further argues, the outcome of reframing is "drawing of a different frame around the same set of circumstances so that new pathways come into view" (150). In the previous passage, Woolf explicitly indicates the set of patriarchal circumstances around women's conditions and moves forward to the second step, paving new pathways into view, illustrated in this consecutive part of the metaphor:

That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. And it serves to explain how restless they are under her criticism; how impossible it is for her to say to them this book is bad, this picture is feeble, or whatever it may be, without giving far more pain and rousing far more anger than a man would do who gave the same criticism. For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? ... The looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system. Take it away and man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine. (Woolf 26)

Ironically, the inferiority of women comes with a power that sets the superior party, men, in a restless state of need to the approval of the inferior one, women. As Sánchez Cuervo argues in "Metaphor and Simile as Communicative Devices in the Essays of Virginia Woolf," "we perceive an irony that tries to convey, if we continue the reading of the essay, that men feel their superiority when they see themselves reflected in women's apparent inferiority" (169). Through this metaphor, Woolf delegitimizes the illusionary superiority of men and asserts that if women decide to use their power for own

their service, the enlarged figure of men will seize and diminish, which will consequently disrupt the patriarchal ideology as a whole and shift gender-power dynamics.

Hence, the looking-glass metaphor becomes an argument itself, structured more efficiently and comprehensively to make Woolf's premises more appealing and action-calling. As Cuervo justifies, Woolf

subverts the conceptual structures of language through the metaphor as a persuasive device that characterizes the style of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In the case of metaphor and simile, a double effect is achieved as far as the reader should be capable of perceiving the aesthetic pleasure deriving from the artistry of those rhetorical figures and the intellectual value attached to them. (170)

In the looking-glass metaphor, reframing the inferiority of women, challenging patriarchal traditions, and Woolf's efforts to engage her female audience in acts of self-definition and redefinition are the ultimate intellectual motifs that become aesthetically pleasurable when framed in stylistic symbols and images.

The patriarchal traditions are then discredited by Ziadeh and Woolf, each in her own style. Writing in times of modernity and the rise of feminist movements, I put myself in their shoes, and ask: So, what now? What are the new conditions we are framing for women if we were to rupture from patriarchal traditions that have chained us for long? Our path is thorny and full of hurdles, so how will we proceed? Will men of our times support our break from patriarchal traditions, or will they oppose us? To what extent will we break free? And how does our context, or position, determine and influence our attitude towards this rupture?

If I were to start with Woolf this time, her arguments against traditions generally, and patriarchal ones in specific, are sharp and pointed. In the first few pages of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf narrates a story where her anger is utterly expressed. Though the

setting of this story is fictive, taking place in a university she names Oxbridge, women's inaccessibility to the library that symbolizes on a wider scale their inaccessibility to spaces of knowledge production and circulation remains true. As Woolf writes, "That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library...Never will I wake those echoes, never will I ask for that hospitality again, I vowed as I descended the steps in anger" (4). Refusing patriarchal authorities over cultural traditions, Woolf does not only express anger, but also a firm will to fight against these traditions and break these chains of patriarchy. Returning to the library incident four chapters later, Woolf affirms, "I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt, that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (56).

Driven by anger towards the superior sex, Woolf decides to forcefully rupture from all traditions that empowered men to acquire this status and have simultaneously forced women to be inferior and secondary to men. Through the words of a fictional woman writer, Miss West, Woolf expresses her stance towards men whom she describes as "snobs" (25). Imagining the patriarchal response to this description, she continues,

The arrant feminist! She says that men are snobs! The exclamation, to me so surprising—for why was Miss West an arrant feminist for making a possibly true if uncomplimentary statement about the other sex?—was not merely the cry of wounded vanity; it was a protest against some infringement of his power to believe in himself. (Woolf 25)

As evident in this passage, Woolf's attitude towards men is not a friendly one nor does it suggest a possibility of support from men's side towards women's emancipation. Miss West, the fictional writer, is so-called an "arrant feminist" for describing men as snobs. At the heart of this passage, Woolf is shifting the traditional gender power dynamics that

have always set women in a lower and less significant status when compared to men. In describing men as “the other sex,” Woolf places them in a peripheral status as opposed to the previous pivotal role they have acquired in patriarchal societies. These attempts at turning traditional gender dynamics upside down further align with the looking-glass metaphor where Woolf affirms woman’s power to shrink man’s figure and thus enhance and enlarge hers. Therefore, equality between men and women is not on Woolf’s modern agenda of feminism. Rather, she empowers women to withdraw the superiority of men and affirm theirs.

However, the case with Ziadeh is different. Although she, too, acknowledges the previous inferiority of women throughout history, Ziadeh’s conception of modernism involves the equality between men and women away from the superiority of any party over the other. Her notion of a “modern woman and the bearer of tomorrow’s hopes” is dependent on the aspired equality between her and man on “literary, civil, and political grounds” (Ziadeh 37). To achieve this equality, Ziadeh regards modern men as supporters of women’s movement in Egypt, which is an absent approach in Woolf’s text. Hence, the tradition of worshiping men remained central in Ziadeh’s project of modernity unlike Woolf who has detached herself from cultural norms that assert the power of and the need for men. In the seventh and last subtitle from “al-mar’a wa al- tamaddun,” entitled “Sharārat al-hayāt Fī Masr: ṣawt al-mar’a min A’māq al-duhūr” (The Spark of Life in Egypt: Women’s Voice Beaming from the Depths of Eons), Ziadeh writes,

في كل مكان تفتح المرأة عينها لنور الحياة حتى في أطراف الشرق الأقصى، في الصين واليابان، وفي تركيا. وها أنا أرى شرارة الحياة تشتعل في مصر أيضاً، حيث الرجال يساعدوننا بأفلامهم وبألسنتهم... أجل في مصر تتكسر القيود الدهرية التي طالما عدت فكر المرأة ونحن اليوم على عتبة مستقبل باهر. في مصر تشتعل شرارة الحياة والا فماذا يعني وقوفي بينكم أيها السادة، وماذا يعني سكوتكم الجميل المملوء اصغاء تاماً وتشجيعاً قوياً وتفكيراً عميقاً؟ أتكلم الآن بحرقه كأنني صوت المرأة الصامت منذ أجيال، وتستمعون إليّ بإشفاق كأتمكم نفس الرجل المشتتة منذ ابتداء الدهور. النفس الكبيرة



المبعثرة تستجمع قواها للإصغاء، والصوت الخافت الذي لم يتعود إلا همس الطاعة وتمتمة التمرد  
المبهم، يرتفع أتياً من عمق أعماق الدهور السوداء... أتياً من القبور، من البحار، من عناصر الحياة  
جميعاً صارخاً: أيها الرجل! لقد أذلتني فكنت ذليلاً. حررني لتكن حرّاً، حررني لتحرّر الإنسانية!  
(زيادة ٤١)

The woman is opening her eyes to witness the light of life in all places, even as far as the fringes of the Far East, in China, Japan, and in Turkey. And here I am, witnessing the spark of life igniting in Egypt as well, where men help us with their pens and words... It is true, the shackles that have always tortured women and their thinking are now breaking in Egypt, and we stand today on the gate of a promising future. In Egypt, the spark of life is igniting, or otherwise, what would my stand in front of you, gentlemen, imply? And what would your eloquent silence mean? A silence that is backed with attentive listening, a strong encouragement, and thorough thinking. I tearfully speak today as though I am the ancient and silent voice of women, and you listen to me with pity, as if you are the scattered spirit of men from the beginning of time. Your huge yet scattered spirit gathers its strength to listen to me, and the faint voice that is accustomed to whispers of obedience and mutters of vague rebellion, rises from the depths of the dark eons... It rises from the graves, from the seas, and from all elements of life, crying out: O man! You ashamed me so you too were ashamed. Free me today to be free, and to free the humanity! (Ziadeh 41)

As this passage suggests, Ziadeh considered women's awakening in Egypt a spark of hope that ruptured from the traditional, dark, and patriarchal history of women. However, this awakening is not limited to Egypt only but has spread wide "in all places" including the countries of the Far East(41). Shortly before this passage, Ziadeh further counts Western countries like France, America, Germany, and Italy advancing towards "the light of feminine ascendance" (37). In instances like this, Ziadeh's notion of global modernism manifests itself once again particularly as she includes Egypt's Nahda in a global movement rather than confining it to the geographical borders of the country.

When comparing Ziadeh's approach to patriarchal traditions with Woolf's, a couple of questions arise. Looking at the passage abovementioned, it becomes clear that Ziadeh did not exclude men from her project of modernism like Woolf pointedly did. Rather, she expresses gratitude for men's support at the time and even ties the freedom

of women to the greenlight given by men. But why would Ziadeh still appeal to men if she were to become free from the shackles of tradition? In this case, would Ziadeh and Woolf equally count as modernists and pioneers in women's emancipation movements? Or is Ziadeh less of an advocate for liberation than Woolf? In seeking answers for these questions, I return to Damrosch who tackles the rupture from traditions from both a western and non-western point of view. As he rightly argues, "modernism involves a sense of "an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time" (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 20). Yet for many writers this rupture is a qualified one shadowed by the presence of a distant past to which they remain inextricably tied" (Damrosch 43-44).

Just because Ziadeh's rupture from traditions is a shy one, shadowed by the immense power traditions have held in her context for long, does not make Ziadeh less of an advocate for women's emancipation and modernist than Woolf. On the contrary, we might think about these different approaches to traditions as occurrences of global debates on the same topic, happening at the same time, yet from different contexts around the world. This effectively falls into the core of global modernism, a field that regards decentered and non-diffusionist modes of comparison as a principal motif to become global in reach (Hayot and Walkowitz 3). Bringing in this comparative approach serves to prove that Ziadeh's modernism, and the Nahda more generally, is not of any less importance than Woolf's Western movement. Rather, their divergent attitudes towards traditions stem from their peculiar positions and contexts. In the British scene, the continuity of traditions in the early twentieth century was easily disrupted but not so easily and immediately disturbed in the Egyptian context.

Unlike Ziadeh then, Woolf ruptured from the past with all its traditions and authorities on linguistic, cultural, and even religious levels. Since modernism in the West

marked a paradigm shift from the continuity of tradition to its disruption, this disruption also involved the level of faith and religious feelings. In his book *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Callum Brown provides a comprehensive account of the decline of religion and its importance in the British society during the twentieth century. Specific to the focus of this study and its time-period, Brown suggests in his first chapter that

the strength, significance and character of British religion changed more profoundly than in any other period of recorded history... It was the first century in which Christianity lost its dominance of public culture, private morality and the media of the day... It was the first century during which Christian behavior became unenforceable by the state, with the repeal, liberalization or effective collapse of traditional Christian-based laws. (2)

This collapse of traditional laws was mirrored in the literature of the period and especially in Woolf's text where she strongly criticizes religion on two main incidents, the first being her encounter with a bishop, narrated as follows:

I concluded, and I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He wrote to the papers about it. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort. How much thinking those old gentlemen used to save one! How the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach! Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare. (Woolf 34)

The death of the bishop in this passage is compelling because it symbolizes on a meta-level the death of the old tradition of religion in times of modernism. Although dead, this bishop captures the patriarchy and misogynistic approach of religious authorities towards

women, which is evident in his declaration that women can never write like or ascend to the level of Shakespearean writing.

Woolf's second criticism of religion is showcased in her reflection on chastity that "had then" and "has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest" (36). Wrapped by the traditions of religion that were essential to British culture for centuries, women of the early twentieth century had to redefine their identities away from patriarchal norms that regard chastity as the core virtue of a woman. This brings back Brown's book to the table where he points out in his fourth chapter that the modern woman was "reinventing herself" as "an action woman and moving away from having to live up to the status of moral angel," which is exactly what Woolf advocated for (Brown 122). Chastity has put a heavy weight on women's shoulders for long, and it has even taken its toll on their writings. As Woolf continues,

It was the relic of the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to women even so late as the nineteenth century. Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand, all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man. Thus they did homage to the convention, which if not implanted by the other sex was liberally encouraged by them (the chief glory of a woman is not to be talked of, said Pericles, himself a much-talked-of man) that publicity in women is detestable. Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them. They are not even now as concerned about the health of their fame as men are, and, speaking generally, will pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it, as Alf, Bert or Chas. (Woolf 37)

The tradition of invisibility for women writers that ran until the nineteenth century is thoroughly narrated in this passage. Women writers not only lived in anonymity but died unknown, too. The relic, or the remnants of chastity, has forced women to use

pennames to avoid the detestable publicity and to escape the cruel eyes of their patriarchal society. In drawing a comparison between the praised publicity and fame for men writers with the rather dictated anonymity for women, Woolf provides another significant reason as to why patriarchal traditions must be left behind when proceeding in modernity. To envision the future of a modern woman who ruptured from traditions and went on an individual journey of self-discovery, Woolf comes back to her fictional woman writer, Mary Carmichael, who has published her first book “in this very month of October” and titled it “LIFE’S ADVENTURE” (59). Woolf is aware that the book is “not so-well written” but nonetheless gives the writer credit for “making the attempt” (70). Describing the hardships that a modern woman writer in the early twentieth century would encounter, Woolf writes towards the end of her fifth chapter,

At any rate, she was making the attempt. And as I watched her lengthening out for the test, I saw, but hoped that she did not see, the bishops and the deans, the doctors and the professors, the patriarchs and the pedagogues all at her shouting warning and advice. You can't do this and you shan't do that! Fellows and scholars only allowed on the grass! Ladies not admitted without a letter of introduction...Think only of the jump, I implored her, as if I had put the whole of my money on her back; and she went over it like a bird. But there was a fence beyond that and a fence beyond that. Whether she had the staying power I was doubtful...But she did her best. (Woolf 70)

In this passage, Woolf sums up her whole approach to tradition. Despite being a fictional character, Carmichael represents women writers of Woolf’s time who must courageously jump from the past and all its anachronistic traditions to a rather modern future. She must “think only” of this jump and must also fly away “like a bird” leaving behind the cage of traditions she has been locked into for centuries (70). She must open her wings wide to explore the feel of freedom on her own. As Woolf writes, there will always be fences that Carmichael must cross, but she must maintain her “staying power”

and her ability to overcome the bumps on the road of modernity and freedom. Promised by a better future of female writers, Woolf envisions Carmichael becoming a poet and writing “a better book” if she were given “another hundred years” and “a room of her own and five hundred a year” (70).

Woolf’s heroine then, or her version of a new woman, should break away from all the traditions that tie her to the past, including linguistic, cultural, and religious constraints. Shifting to the Egyptian scene of modernity, we are confronted by Ziadeh’s account of the interconnections between modernity and religion, which is not notable in Woolf’s text, due to the debatable “religion- modernity” dichotomy in Egypt during Al Nahda. While western modernists treasured the rupture from the past with all its authorities, including the religious one as evident above, modernists in Egypt were uncertain about the relationship between the emerging phenomena of modernity and the rooted tradition of religion. As a pioneering thinker of Al Nahda, Ziadeh defended the harmony between the two and even argued in “Awwal man Rafa‘a Sha’n al- mar’a” (The First People to Praise Women) that Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammad were the first people to praise women and treat her as equal to men (Ziadeh 34-35). Writing from early twentieth century Egypt where the question of religion was both controversial and problematic, Ziadeh clearly emphasizes that religion doesn’t hinder her project of modernity but rather supports and completes it. Hence, she does not rupture from the tradition of religion. On the contrary, she provides a new perspective that reinterprets religion to make it fit for the modern needs and demands of the early twentieth century. A reform is needed, but the proposals of this reform must be “modern and sane” to obtain a balance between entrenched traditions and novel modernism (Ziadeh 39).

However, one cannot speak about women's movement in Egypt without mentioning the national movement that sprung at the time against British colonialism. As Nawar Al-Hassan Golley points out in her article "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?", "feminist consciousness has developed hand in hand with national consciousness" since the nineteenth century in the Arab world (521). As she further argues, feminism is an "indigenous product of Arabic political and socioeconomic dynamics," challenging the Eurocentric approach to feminism as bestowed upon Arabs in times of colonialism (521). Basing her treatise on the Egyptian model, Golley further emphasizes that women's movement in the Nahda has indeed been impacted by movements from other parts of the world, but that "does not make it alien to Arab culture as such" (521).

Golley's premises are impeccably manifested in Ziadeh's works, and especially in her article "The Awakening of Egyptian Womanhood" (2). First and foremost, the co-development of feminist and national consciousness becomes evident in the following passage,

How can I speak of the awakening of women in those days without emphasizing the wave of patriotism which surged through all the inhabitants of the Nile Valley without distinction of race or religion? The women of Egypt were enthusiastic and indomitable; no longer were they the veiled and secluded women of earlier days. They organized public patriotic demonstrations and marched through the streets waving banners and acclaiming their county and the cause of liberty. Egyptian boys and young men formed a kind of hedge on either side of the women as they marched, in order to protect them from insult or danger. (Ziadeh 41)

Correlating "the awakening of women" with the national and patriotic movement, Ziadeh once again portrays the modern Egyptian woman as a liberal and national member who nonetheless remains protected by Egyptian "boys and young men" (41). As she later

writes in the same passage, “women work with men for the good of the nation,” opposing in that sense Woolf’s modern woman who seeks her individual journey with a total break up with traditions and an affirmation of her superiority over the other sex.

When it comes to traditions, Ziadeh is more conservative than Woolf, but as Golley rightly argues, this doesn’t make the Egyptian model of feminism less significant than the western one. Contrariwise, it affirms the significance and the uniqueness of context in the making of women’s movement to match, in Ziadeh’s words, “the real needs of our own country” (43). Nationalism then, and guarding the role of a housewife, are pillars for becoming a modern Egyptian woman in the early twentieth century. As Ziadeh writes, “Today Egyptian women are studying for most of the professions open to women in other lands,” presenting here the advancement of the Egyptian women’s movement while connecting it back to other modern movements around the globe (42). Yet, for Ziadeh, women’s involvement in the outside world is not enough. As she continues, “The subject which occupies the foremost place in the minds of modern women, however, is that of the protection of children. In my opinion this is the first, the most noble, and the most useful of all duties of woman” (42). In brief, modern Egyptian women are invited to open up to the world and to engage in different professions. However, they should always prioritize their traditional duties as housewives and mothers who dedicate themselves “for the best interests of the family, and beyond that for the highest national ideals” (43). In Ziadeh’s treatise, unlike Woolf, these conditions are put on top of the pyramid to ensure “to the women of Egypt their own evolution” as they stand on the verge of a modern future while keeping their feet planted on traditional grounds (43).



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Ziadeh and Woolf take divergent, often opposite approaches in their critique of traditions. However, they still share an experience of alienation in a literary tradition that excludes female voices and narratives. Ziadeh starts her book *Sawāniḥ Fatāt* (A young woman's thoughts)<sup>3</sup>, which was published in 1922, with an introductory article titled “al-sāniḥa al-ūlā” (The first thought). There, Ziadeh demonstrates her keen awareness of the male-dominated intellectual public and its critical eye on women's literary input. She also speaks about the importance of appealing to this audience in the preliminary stage of women's writing during Al Nahda. With a pleading tone and an opt for tolerance and recognition, she writes,

خطوة صالحة نحو تكريم الأدب النسائي، إلا أن فيها من الظلم و غمط الحقوق ما فيها. نحن نحبّ الحلم، ونطلب التساهل، ونريد أن يستعان في الحكم علينا "بالظروف المخففة"، كما يقول سادتنا الحقوقيون. نريد ذلك لأننا مبتدئات. نريده لأننا مبتدئات ولأننا بنات يوم تشرق علينا شمس، نخلق أنفسنا بأيدينا، ونكتشف الطرق في غابات مهجورة، ونمهد السبل بين الصخور والأدغال لنا وللآتيات بعدنا. إفساح المجال علينا عسير، فنشكر للحليم تغاضيه عن القصور في عملنا وانتباهه لضالة وراثتنا في عالم القلم. (زيادة ٧)

This is a salutary step in honoring women's literature, except that it lacks justice and recognition of our rights. We are dreamers. We love to dream, and we ask for tolerance and for a “mild verdict” as our jurists say. We demand

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<sup>3</sup> As Simone de Beauvoir writes, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. My decision in translating “fatāt” as a “young woman” instead of the literal and typical translation of a “girl” has been deeply influenced by this saying. Firstly, “young woman” has the connotation of puberty that is elemental in the modern view of “womanhood”. A young woman is someone who has reached puberty and is at the early age of developing her personality, identity, and thinking of her future. In a way, it alludes to the fact that this young woman sees, reads, and understands her body experience as relating to womanhood, and possibly to conceptions of femininity. “Imra'a” would be a fully developed woman, and a girl is in pre-puberty stage. Hence the phrase that I chose, young woman, falls in between these two stages and leans more towards aspired womanhood. Moreover, this translation fits nicely in the context of Ziadeh's book that I read as a preparatory guide for woman writers who are still beginners, and young. With no tradition of writing in their backs, these young women are not born, but rather become writers.

your leniency because we are beginners. We are the daughters of a day whose sun shines on us. We create our own legacy, and we discover paths in deserted forests and pave the way between rocks and bushes for us and for women who will come after us. Allocating a space for us, women, is not that easy. So, we thank the tolerant critic for overlooking the shortcomings of our writing and for recognizing our meager literary heritage. (Ziadeh 7)

Ziadeh regards the increasing public awareness to women's writing as a "salutary step" in honoring their literature (7). At the same time, she carefully warns against prejudices and criticisms related to "shortcomings" in style that the Nahda male intellectuals would have held (7). In what seems like a court scene, Ziadeh asks the public eye for a "mild verdict" because women have a "meager" and inadequate literary tradition to build on in comparison with men (7). Set in this context, women become "dreamers" who come out of the shadows of the past to experiment with new ways of writing and to prepare for future generations of women writers a tradition that they can build on when looking back at history.

Carrying the same concerns, Woolf too criticizes the weight of "discouragement and criticism" upon women's writing (56). However, both previous societal setbacks become unimportant when compared "with the other difficulty which faced them... that is they had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help" (57). As she continues,

For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure... perhaps the first thing she (a woman writer) would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use... Indeed, since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women. (57)

Building her argument on social and historical treatises, Woolf justifies the trials and errors women writers of her time had to go through given the lack of a solid literary tradition. As they thought back through their mothers, these writers were faced by the “scarcity and inadequacy of tools” that obstructed their creation of art. With no ready sentence or expression for inspiration from former women writers, Woolf’s heroines, like Ziadeh’s, create their own legacy and discover their journey of writing along the way.

Despite spatial differences, both Woolf and Ziadeh took part in a global project of producing a tradition of women’s writing in times of modernism. Alienated from a history that excluded them, these women sought individual, yet female-collective, journeys of self-discovery and self-expression. More particularly, this history shadowed, neglected, and depicted women through a patriarchal gaze as it was “written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth” (Woolf 23). Seeking chances for authentic self-expression, Ziadeh describes the desire “to examine the female self through her own self-perception and not through the male writers’ words” (Ziadeh 7). In Ziadeh and Woolf’s words, we sense a flow of dichotomies, an “us” and “them”, a way that they, men, describe us, women, vs. how we ought to represent ourselves in writing. Woolf often reflects on the scene of “the shut doors of the library” and “how unpleasant it is to be locked out” after being literally kicked out from the university’s library, a place that alludes more generally to knowledge production and circulation (17). Ziadeh recalls moments of history where women were “hated and despised by all people” and left alone without “one friend or supporter” (33). Excluded from the intellectual world both in social practices and in historical writings, Ziadeh and Woolf resort to generating a tradition of women’s writing they can belong to different from the patriarchal traditions they distanced themselves from.

However, as Ziadeh and Woolf sought to situate themselves in their respective societies, some differences arise. Surely, we sense a female community forming throughout. However, Woolf's modern woman, coming to life in her fictional character Mary Carmichael, must "think only of the jump" and cut all ties with past traditions, but Ziadeh always sets her heroine in the pyramid of the nation and includes this new woman in the national project she builds hand in hand with Nahdawi men. This raises questions to try and understand the different scenarios and approaches to tradition between Ziadeh and Woolf, despite being equally shadowed by patriarchy. Why would Woolf insist on a sharp "cut off" from her predecessors while Ziadeh constructs her version of a modern woman under the umbrella of the nation?

Although this question is beyond the scope of this research project, I would like to briefly outline a response by bringing a new question into the discussion, the question of *aṣāla*, authenticity, and its centrality for understanding traditions in global modernism. How did the concept of authenticity function across different cultures in the same period? What makes one authentic, and what are the reference points to measure this authenticity? To return to Ziadeh and Woolf writing in the early twentieth century, what did it mean to be a modern woman writer at the time? Is it to be authentic, or inauthentic? To be sincere to traditions, or to outgrow and overthrow them? Is *aṣāla* anchored more firmly in the Arab world? If so, what are the reasons behind this strong, and almost necessary, presence?

I argue that authenticity is intrinsic to the formation of modernism in the Egyptian and British spheres, and that notions of authenticity are embedded in defining modernism and the making of a modern writer. As defined by Vincent Sherry, authenticity "picks up meanings that range from originality to legitimacy, from a sense of generative or

instigating force to a quality of genuineness” (481). There are many factors to be considered in addressing this quality of authenticity ranging from the time-element to points of reference and societal norms that influence the significance of being “authentic”. In Ziadeh’s case, authenticity has been central to intellectual debates among Arab thinkers and artists long before Al Nahda period and is still debatable today. However, the focus here lies on early twentieth century Egypt, and specifically Ziadeh’s stand in the debate of authenticity, self-definition and redefinition, and cultural estrangement in postcolonial Egypt.

As Ahmad Agbaria argues in *The Politics of Arab Authenticity*, the feeling that “the Arab subject is cast adrift, alienated and unmoored from cultural anchorage, has been the experience of the ex-colonized Arab peoples as they entered the modern age” (10). To contextualize the debates at the time, the Arab intellectual community was polarized into two groups: one that embraced the awakening period with an “eagerness to escape the constraints of history” and another that linked the protection of traditions with the so-called Arab authenticity. This authenticity was seen as a core principle that was lost and must be regained against British colonial authorities. Considering the cultural exposure to Europe at the time, traditionalists refused to import European modern ideas and alternatively favored a return to the roots, culture, and traditions.

Out of this socio-political and critical moment, much of the intellectual thought and art was born. For Ziadeh, I analyze her stance in this intellectual debate as an in-between shade between two extremes. On multiple occasions, her call for educational and social reform that aligns with “a clear vision of the real needs of our country,” and might not align with Europe’s agenda, demonstrates her keen national consciousness (43). She does encourage gradual reform and opening up to Europe as long as Nahdawi intellectuals

remain selective with their choices of cultural exchange. When speaking of modernizing language, Ziadeh encourages woman writers to preserve the “echoes of ancient glory” and to embrace their “oriental nature” while simultaneously working on “modern personal creativity” (43). This sense of turning to traditions as an anchoring source of knowledge is “neither backward looking nor irrational,” and it answers back to the significance of authenticity in protecting the Arab identity and nation in postcolonial times. As Agbaria rightly points out, “it reflects a society in search of moral anchors in times of cultural disenchantment” (4).

Ziadeh did not stand with cutting off ties with traditions to make room for modernity, nor did she believe in remaining tied to these traditions. Her vision of modernism is one of mediation between a past that has been suppressed by colonialism and a present that requires a move forward while remaining authentic to her Arab roots. To reference an example from contemporary monumental art to Ziadeh’s, one can’t dismiss the work of the Egyptian sculpturer Mahmoud Mukhtar who is known as the father of modern sculpture in the Arab world. Specific to this context, I am referring to his most famous sculpture *Nahdat Misr*, Egypt Awakened, which was first unveiled in 1928 (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Mahmoud Mukhtar. *Nahdat Misr*, 1928, Cairo, Egypt.

In his book *Conflicted Antiquities*, Elliott Colla reads *Nahdat Misr* as an object that links “past, present, and future” (230). This sculpture depicts a colossal sphinx, symbolizing the “glory of the past”, and a peasant woman unveiling her face with one hand while the other hand stretches over the Sphinx (230). Mukhtar’s anticolonial national aspirations and his vision of a modern woman come together in this work of art. He illustrates an awakening that is rooted in authentic past traditions but denotes enthusiasm for a promising female future. The new Nahdawi woman, *al-mar’ a al- jadīda*, is no longer in the shadows of the past. On the contrary, she takes a central role in the national project as she stands next to the Sphinx and proudly lifts her veil, symbolizing on a meta-level the rise of Egyptian nationalism and modern aspirations.

I borrow this phrase, *al-mar’ a al- jadīda*, from Qasim Amin’s book title. Amin (1863-1908) is an Egyptian philosopher, reformer, and judge. He has been historically viewed as “the liberator of women,” particularly after he published his two books *Tahrīr al-Mar’ a* (The Liberation of Women, 1899) and *Al -mar’ a al- Jadīda* (The New Woman, 1900). In her book *Ghāyat al-ḥayāt* (The Meaning of Life, 1921), Ziadeh regards Qasim as “za’īm al-nahda al-nisā’ iyya” (the leader of women’s renaissance), arguing that young Egyptian women were nurtured by “Qasim’s spirit” over the years (Ziadeh 12). This reputation remains a subject of scholarly controversy, especially as Amin ties the liberation of women with the act of unveiling in his book *Tahrīr al-Mar’ a*. However, his influence on the Egyptian intellectual thought is evident in Mukhtar’s monument particularly as the woman, symbolizing Egypt’s awakening, unveils her face. Taken together, the overlap between Ziadeh, Amin, and Mukhtar highlights one discussion among many in the larger debates on tradition, authenticity, and modernity during Al Nahda.

Ziadeh's approach to tradition connects to a broader umbrella of alienation and authenticity as it comes from a colonized point of view that Woolf could never experience as a white European writer. However, and as Charles Lowney writes, no one in modern Western culture was "unaffected by the call of authenticity," but what it means to be authentic in the West is very different from that in the East (Lowney 45). Most modern western writers of the 1920s, including Woolf, were driven by a sense of difference between their contemporary moment and past traditions. Unlike its close ties to nationalism in Egypt, authenticity in the west was linked to notions of autonomy, individualism, and artistic creation.

As Lowney points out, "a self that merely conforms to a social role is seen as inauthentic," hence an alienated self "in search of an authentic way of being becomes the cultural hero" (34). Because an individual search for authenticity refuses abiding to social norms, the process "involves rebellion against society and traditions" (34), a claim that is evident in Woolf's approach to traditions discussed in my third chapter. Set in this context, Woolf's individualism and her rupture from traditions are inherently tied to the concept of authenticity. By remaking herself against already-existing norms, to mention streams of consciousness as one example among many, Woolf is responding to this call of being, or becoming, "authentic". Nonetheless, when comparing authenticity in Ziadeh and Woolf's writings, it seems to occupy a stronger presence and influence in Ziadeh's vision of modernism than Woolf's. While the socio-political opposing scenes of the colonizer and the colonized impact notions, meanings, and functions of authenticity, there remain other factors to explore in future projects.

In conclusion, Ziadeh's *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* are splendid examples of modernist writing. In juxtaposing these texts that were never



studied in tandem before, I attempt to trace common modern motifs coming from two woman writers while consciously avoiding the dissolve of their unique and local contexts. The theoretical framework of global modernism is the precondition that allowed me to move forward in my non-hierarchical comparison of Ziadeh and Woolf. In trespassing Eurocentric and patriarchal shades of modernity, I first argue for comparing Al Nahda and Western movements as equals apart from the reductive and diffusionist reading of Al Nahda as othered by the “One” and only Western modernity. I then proceed with a close reading of two publications after recovering Ziadeh in the Arab and global modern scenes of the early twentieth century.

In translating excerpts from Ziadeh’s works in my project, I contribute to the circulation of her writings beyond their original Arabic language and lands where they are even overlooked. In setting Ziadeh in the same league as Woolf, an iconic western figure of modernism, I advocate for more inclusive and expansive comparative studies that shed light on overshadowed women writers, like May Ziadeh, who deserve efforts of recovery and scholarly attention. The concepts I chose to compare are also elemental to the expansion of comparative studies. In my second chapter, I argue for adding the keyword “shadow” as a new term to think through global modernism. After analyzing the shadowing of their writing in modernist studies, I then discuss how Ziadeh and Woolf themselves responded to the multiple shadows in the Egyptian and British context respectively. Although the keyword “tradition” is already being discussed in global modernism, my third chapter contributes to adding an Arab modern lens to enrich already existing discussions and to suggest the possibility of multi-conceptions and functions of tradition beyond the European archive. Through this new lens, authenticity comes into view as an emerging question to explore in relation to global modernist studies.

As Woolf writes, “books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately” (59). As I come to write my final words on this project, I look back and think about *Kalimāt au Ishārāt* and *A Room of One’s Own* as books that do continue each other, sometimes similarly, confusingly, or even oppositely. But if I were to judge, I would present them as complementary works whose richness prevails in giving more than one perspective, more than a center-periphery comparison, and making possible conversations across borders in the world of global modernism.

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